

No 135.

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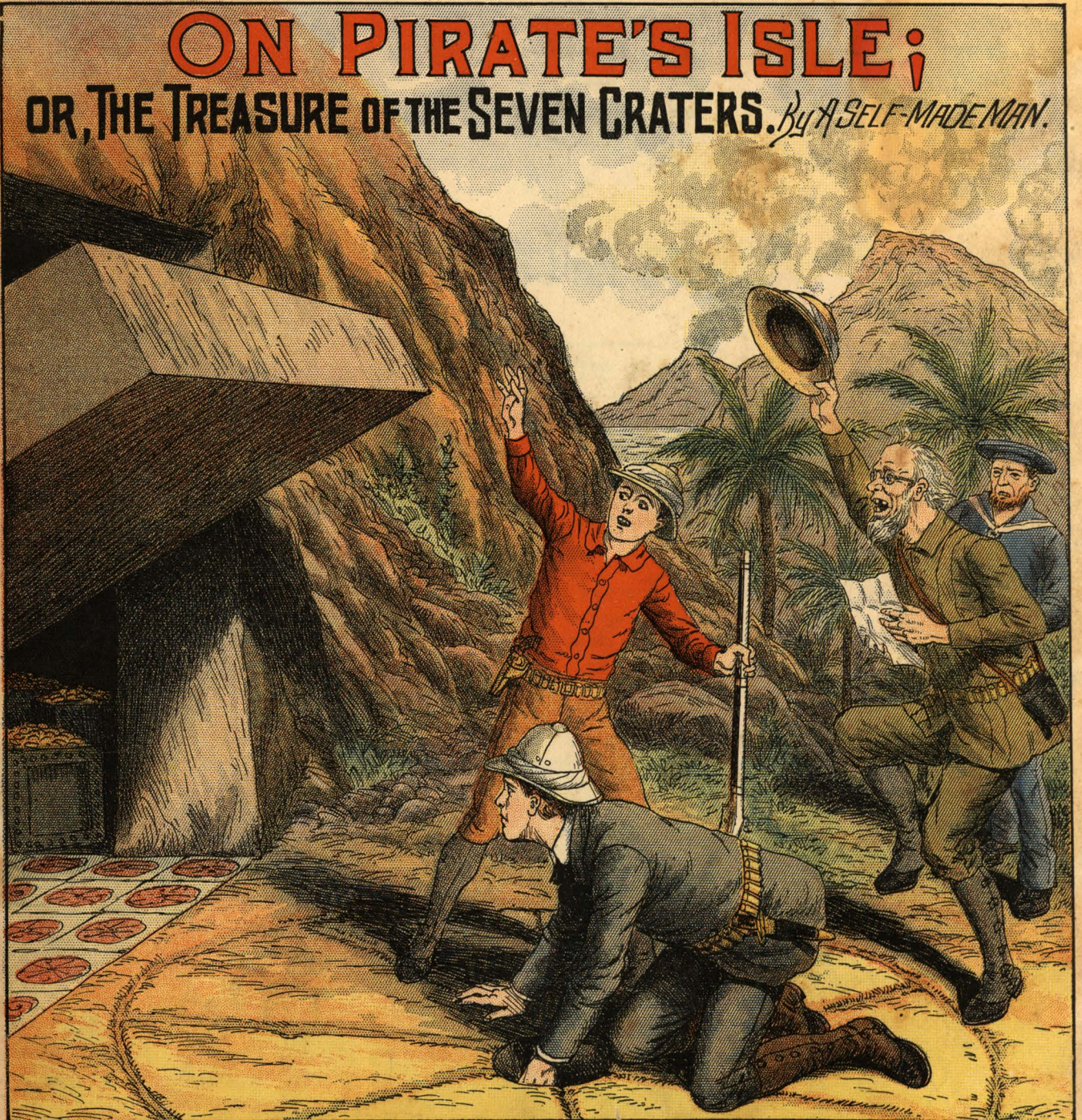
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FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

ON PIRATE'S ISLE;
OR, THE TREASURE OF THE SEVEN CRATERS. *By A SELF-MADE MAN.*



As Val pressed the knob in the basin-like hole a remarkable change took place in the apparently solid surface of the rock. A ponderous stone, working on an axis, swung downward into a horizontal position revealing a room beyond.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1908, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 135.

NEW YORK, MAY 1, 1908.

PRICE 5 CENTS.

ON PIRATE'S ISLE

OR,

THE TREASURE OF THE SEVEN CRATERS

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE ISLAND OF THE SEVEN CRATERS.

"We seem to be up against it hard, Tom," said Valentine Vance to his chum, Tom Messenger. "If there is anything worse under the sun than to be becalmed in a tropical sea I'd like to know what it is."

"That's right, Val. It's been as hot as blue blazes all day, and not a breath of air to fan a fellow's parboiled face. The sinking sun doesn't seem to bring a bit of relief as far as I can see. There isn't a cloud in the sky, nor a ripple on the ocean anywhere. Looks as if we're as good as anchored for the night."

"And for to-morrow, and to-morrow night, and next day, if not longer, as well. Jack Junk says you never can tell just how long these calms may last."

"Doesn't it put you somewhat in mind of the 'Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner' with his painted ship upon a painted ocean?"

"It does, with the horrors left out. That poem was enough to curdle your blood if read under proper conditions. The only person on board who seems to be at all contented with the present state of affairs is Professor Scotchley. He seems able to stand any amount of roasting. I believe if he was fried over a slow fire he wouldn't kick if he had his beloved box of specimens to monkey over."

"There's another chap aboard who enjoys this roasting even better than the professor."

"You mean——"

"Hop Hi, the cook."

"The chief mate made him hop high to-day with a rope's end for spoiling the soup," chuckled Val. "He's a pretty clever Chink, just the same. Seems to have taken a shine to you and me and the professor."

"That's because we tip him off every once in awhile," said Tom. "Nobody else aboard gives him a cent."

"He doesn't look for a tip from anybody else. We're passengers and are supposed to come up for any little extra attention on his part. I wonder what island that is which we have sighted. There's a lot of smoke coming from the top of it. Just as if there were several big factory chimneys down there working overtime."

"Must be volcanic craters in action," replied Tom. "I'll borrow the mate's glass and we'll get a better look at them before night shuts them out."

Tom walked off toward the poop, or quarter deck, where the chief mate was fanning himself under the broad awning which had been spread to ward off the fierce heat of the sun, leaving Val standing by the bulwark in the waist of the vessel gazing at the distant island.

Drifting, but so slowly that her motion was scarcely noticeable, the American full-rigged ship Golden Gate rested on the bosom of the vast South Pacific Ocean.

She was bound from San Francisco to Sydney, Australia, and after a prosperous voyage up to this point, had run into a calm belt that stopped her further progress for the time being.

Ever since the sun rose that morning there had scarcely been wind enough to carry a feather.

It was now close on to sundown, and the air had become so rarefied by the intense heat that the crew were stretched

out under an awning over the forecastle, languid and listless.

The wheel aft was lashed and deserted, for the vessel did not even have steerage way.

The dead calm was terribly tedious to all on board, except Professor Scotchley, perhaps, who seemed to find pleasure and satisfaction under any circumstances in examining and cataloguing his boxes of natural history and other specimens.

The professor had persuaded Captain Rynders to put in for a few hours at several small islands en route so that he could go ashore and look up a few new specimens.

The two boys and a sailor named Jack Junk had accompanied the naturalist on these brief excursions, not because they took any interest in his hobby, but to enjoy a change from the rolling deck of the ship.

Although all hands found the sun sizzling hot in crossing the line, still the strong breeze which propelled the ship on her way tempered the heat to a considerable degree, and they did not feel the same discomfort as that which attended this calm.

Valentine Vance and Tom Messenger were both California boys, born and bred.

They were members of the order called "Native Sons of the Golden West."

Val's father, now dead, had been a '49er.

He had worked in the gold diggings, made a good haul in gold dust and invested it afterward in San Francisco real estate, which netted him a fortune.

Then he started to speculate in mining stocks with the expectation of becoming a millionaire, and narrowly missed fetching up in the poorhouse.

Val and his widowed mother were now living in a modest way on the wreck of his fortune, but the boy was smart and ambitious, and hoped to make a fortune for himself when he got to be a man.

Tom Messenger was the son of a well-to-do architect, still in the land of the living, and had about everything at his command that his heart could wish for.

He and Val, in spite of the difference of their social stations, were sworn friends and companions—a miniature edition of Pylades and Orestes, two famous Greeks whose friendship for each other was proverbial.

A serious illness had so undermined Tom's vitality that the family physician recommended a long sea voyage to build him up.

Tom only consented to take this trip on condition that Val accompany him.

Accordingly, Mr. Messenger agreed to defray Val's expenses, and secured his mother's consent to his taking the journey.

Professor Scotchley, who was Tom's private tutor, was sent with the boys to see that they didn't get into trouble, and to increase their fund of general knowledge.

When the Golden Gate got into the clutches of the calm the party had been at sea many weeks—long enough to tire the boys somewhat with the monotonous sameness of sea and sky, with an occasional island thrown in.

The calm was bad enough, but there was another cause for gloom on board of the ship.

Captain Rynders had been stricken with apoplexy the

day before, and his death was looked for owing to the lack of expert medical treatment.

The ship carried a well-filled medicine chest, and a book treating of every known disease, with explicit directions for emergency cases, but the chief mate, and his subordinate, the second ditto, seemed all at sea in the use thereof.

The captain himself was something of an expert in the medical line from long practice, but he was not now in a condition to avail himself of his own knowledge.

The condition of the captain aroused the gravest concern on board, not only because he was a fine man, an unusually capable navigator and well liked by all, but because his death would put the chief mate in charge of the vessel, and the chief mate, whose name was William Gotch, was generally disliked and feared.

When Tom Messenger went on the poop to ask the chief mate for the loan of his telescope, the second mate was watching by the captain's berth in his stateroom.

Tom would have preferred asking the favor of the second mate, but as the case stood it was the chief mate or nobody he had to go to.

William Gotch was not a handsome man by any means, though Nature, as if to make amends, had given him a strong, well-knit figure.

The usual expression of his features was one of sullenness, as if he was afflicted with a perpetual frown against the world.

His eyes were not pleasant ones to look at, and were rather suggestive of an evil nature.

Altogether, he was not a popular personage aboard, but the knowledge of that fact did not seem to worry him much.

"Mr. Gotch, may I borrow your telescope?" asked Tom, politely.

The chief mate lazily shifted his position in the reclining chair that belonged to the captain and gave the boy a cold stare.

"What do you want with it?" he growled, surlily.

"Val and I want to examine that island in the distance. There seems to be craters on it throwing out a great deal of smoke."

"Craters!" ejaculated the mate, sitting up. "Where is this island?"

"Yonder," replied Tom, waving his arm in the direction where the land lay.

"Go into the passage and fetch the glass you will find hanging there. I will take a squint at the island."

Tom left the poop, entered the passage leading from the main deck to the cabin, unshipped the telescope from its fastenings, and brought it up to the chief mate.

He sighted the distant island and gazed at it some moments with attention.

"That is the Island of the Seven Craters," he said.

Then he handed the glass to Tom, and after rolling a cigarette in an indolent way, lit it and fell back in his former listless attitude.

Tom carried the spyglass to where Val stood leaning over the bulwark.

"Mr. Gotch says that's the Island of the Seven Craters," said Tom, as he raised the glass and took a peep at the far-off land.

"The Island of the Seven Craters," repeated Val. "That's a curious name. I thought that smoke came from

volcanic craters. That island must be the summit of a great submerged mountain peak. It would be a pretty high one if it started from the surface of the earth."

"I guess it would," said Tom. "Here, take a look. You can see the craters quite plainly through the glass."

While Val was looking one of the sailors approached them.

This was Jack Junk, the seaman who had accompanied the professor and the two boys ashore when that privilege was accorded them.

His was not a reassuring countenance by any means.

A man with a broken nose, a shifty glint of the eye, and an indefinable sinister expression about the mouth, is apt to be handicapped in that respect.

"What are ye squintin' at, my hearties?" asked Junk, in a foghorn voice.

"That you, Jack?" said Tom, glancing around at the sailor. "We're looking at the Island of the Seven Craters."

Junk paused in the act of hitching up his trousers.

"What island?" he asked, in a voice that indicated un-usual interest.

"The Island of the Seven Craters. That's what the chief mate called it."

"Let's have a peep," said the sailor, with ill-concealed eagerness.

Val handed him the telescope.

The sailor took a long and sweeping look at the island.

"That's it, sure enough," he muttered, handing the glass back to Val.

"You've seen it before, I s'pose?" said Tom.

"I reckon I have, my jackies. I was wrecked on it nigh on to ten year ago."

"You were!" exclaimed both boys in a breath, regarding Junk with fresh interest.

"I was."

"What kind of place is it?"

"The most wonderful ye ever seen in yer life."

"It is? Then we must get Professor Scotchley to ask Captain Rynders to anchor there for a few hours and let us go ashore," said Val to Tom.

"You forget, Val, that the captain is dangerously ill and may not recover. The ship is now in charge of the chief mate," replied Tom.

"Then the professor will have to ask Mr. Gotch. It's too bad about the skipper. I hope he'll get well."

"The cap'n won't never git well, mark my words on that, my hearties," said Junk, with a significant shake of his head. "He and Davy Jones'll shake hands afore this time to-morrer."

"What makes you think so?" asked Val, with a startled look.

"I have my idee, that's all. Come with me," and Junk led them aft to the break in the poop, up the short ladder to the top of the cabin and aft to the rail above the rudder. "Look here and tell me what ye see."

The boys looked and saw the shiny form of a huge man-eating shark lying motionless close to the surface of the water.

"A shark!" exclaimed Val, with a creepy feeling.

"Prezactly," nodded Junk. "That there shark has been follerin' us since yesterday afternoon. He scents death aboard this hooker and is waitin'."

"Waiting for what?" asked Val.

"A meal."

"I don't understand you."

"Arter the cap'n's dead, he'll be sewn up in a canvas shroud, weighted with a heavy shot and chucked overboard. That there shark knows that as well as I do. He expects to catch the corpse as it goes down."

Junk's words struck the boys unpleasantly.

"Mr. Gotch ought to get a gun and shoot that shark," said Val, vigorously.

"Humph!" replied Junk. "He wouldn't take the trouble."

"Then I'll go down and get my revolver," said Val, starting for the companion-ladder.

"Only a waste of time, my hearty," ejaculated the sailor, seizing the boy by the arm. "Look over again."

Val looked.

"Why, the shark has gone!"

"Prezactly. He heard you and has sunk out of sight for awhile."

The boys looked at Junk, and then at each other, in some wonder.

It didn't seem possible that a shark could understand what had been said about shooting him, and yet he certainly had disappeared as if by magic.

"Maybe he's gone for good," said Tom.

"Don't ye believe it. He ain't far away."

"How can you tell that?" asked Val.

"Ye want me to prove it, eh? Wait."

Junk went forward to the galley and presently returned with a chunk of salt beef tied to a piece of wood.

He chucked it over the stern so that it fell with a splash.

It had hardly hit the water before they heard a rushing sound through the brine, the long, white belly of the shark appeared as it rolled over to give its mouth full swing, then there was a snap and the meat and wood disappeared into the teeth-ribbed opening, and the shark again sank out of sight.

"What did I tell ye? S'pose one of ye had gone over by accident, where would ye be now, eh?" grinned Jack Junk.

The boys shuddered and said nothing.

CHAPTER II.

JACK JUNK TALKS ABOUT PIRATE GOLD.

Soon after the shark incident the sun set below the watery horizon and darkness fell with scarcely any twilight upon the seascape.

Hop Hi came to the head of the companion-way and announced that tea was ready.

Jack Junk went forward and the boys descended to the cabin, followed by the chief mate, who took the captain's chair at the head of the table.

Professor Scotchley was already in his place.

The second mate came out of Captain Rynders' stateroom and reported that the patient was neither better nor worse.

He was still unconscious, and had been so almost from the moment he was struck down by the apoplectic stroke.

The mate left the door of the stateroom open and took his seat at the table.

No one felt like talking except Professor Scotchley, who

bubbled over about his specimens, which rather bored the company.

The first thing the boys did on coming on deck again was to look in the direction of the island, now lost in the obscurity, in spite of the brilliant star-lit heavens.

They expected to see the glow of the craters, but to their surprise there was not the least glimmer of light in the distance.

They hunted Jack Junk up to ask him why there was no fire visible in the top of the craters.

"Nothin' but smoke comes out of them things," answered the sailor.

"Isn't there any lava?"

"Didn't see any when I was there."

"Tell us something about the island, won't you, Jack?" asked Val.

"What do you want to know about it?" growled the sailor.

"Anything. You said that it was the most wonderful place you ever saw."

"So it is."

"In what way is it so wonderful?"

The sailor looked at the boys in what they thought was a peculiar way.

He scratched his stubby chin and looked out over the star-lit sea.

"Come this way, so no one will overhear us," he said, and Val and Tom followed him over to a deserted part of the deck. "To begin with," he continued, as they stood around the mainmast, "that there island is what they call a paradise."

"A paradise," cried Val, "with those seven craters throwing out smoke?"

"That's all they do throw out, and it don't hurt nothin'. They're jest like seven chimneys, that's all. The smoke either goes up in the air or out to sea."

"So the island is a paradise," said Val. "Must be a fine place to live."

"It is, if ye like that kind of livin', which I don't."

"What kind of living do you mean?"

"Doin' nothin' and livin' on the fat of the land. It would suit me if there was a boozin' house where a chap could wet his whistle when he wanted to. There ain't nothin' to drink there but water and cocoanut milk, and I ain't stuck on either. There's somethin' else there that I'd like to git hold of mighty bad," added Jack, with a mysterious look.

"What's that?"

"Money."

"Money!" cried both boys together, in some astonishment.

"Prezactly. Money and joels, and other valuables."

"Money, and jewels, and other valuables on that island?" said Val.

"Loads of 'em," replied the sailor, solemnly.

"How do you know? Did you see them when you were there?"

"Didn't see nothin'."

"Then I don't understand how you can say that such things are there."

"'Cause they were put there."

"Who put them there?"

"Pirates."

"Pirates!" echoed both lads.

"Prezactly. Pirates."

"When were there pirates in this part of the world?" asked Val.

"Seventy-five or eighty year ago, more or less."

"That's right," nodded Tom. "I've read about the pirates of the South Pacific."

"That there island—the Island of the Seven Craters—was the harnt of Vasco, the king-pin pirate of the Pacific. He hid his treasures somewhere there and they hain't never been found."

"How could you tell whether the treasure he may have buried there was found or not?" asked Val, in a tone of interest.

"'Cause I met an old chap who belonged to his crew. He told me the treasure was hid in the side of one of them craters—not at the top where the smoke comes out, but at the bottom."

"He must have been an old chap if he sailed with Vasco the Terrible, as the rascal was called," said Tom.

"He was only a kid when he was aboard the pirate vessel," said Junk.

"I should think so. When did you meet him?"

"Thirty year ago."

"How do you know he was telling the truth when he said he sailed with the pirate?" asked Tom, who doubted the story.

"He was attached to a Spanish monastery in Peru, and I asked the head chap of the place about the yarn the fellow gave me, and he said he had told me the truth."

"If Vasco really buried treasure on that island it's a wonder it hasn't been recovered by somebody. Treasure-hunting expeditions are being fitted out by people every once in awhile. Not long ago one left Frisco to search for the Cocos Island Treasure, said to be worth \$10,000,000."

"Do ye ever hear of them findin' anything?" asked Junk.

"I can't say that I have," admitted Tom; "but I don't hear about everything that's going on."

"If a ten-million treasure was found the news would be in the papers, wouldn't it?"

"Most likely it would, unless the people who found it managed to keep the fact to themselves."

"They couldn't. Ten millions in old foreign money, and old joelry, and old church ornyments, couldn't be disposed of without attractin' notice."

"That's right," nodded Tom. "Ten millions is a lot of money."

"Well, let me tell ye the gold and joels of yonder island warn't never found, though the Spanish Government tried to find it. It's there now."

The boys instinctively gazed out across the ocean.

"Look!" cried Tom. "There's the island now, and it's nearer."

He pointed to where the rising moon was peeping above the watery horizon almost in the track of the island, throwing a halo of light about the seven peaks.

"The hooker is driftin' right down on it," said Junk. "We ought to be close aboard of it in the mornin' if a breeze don't spring up."

"I should like to visit that island," said Val, eagerly.

"So should I," said Tom. "Why can't we, Jack, if this

calm keeps up? The mate can easily come to anchor close to the shore, and we, in company with the professor, can spend our time there while the calm holds. I'll bet it's a sight more comfortable on that island than aboard this ship, where the sun turns the pitch in the deck planks soft."

"Well, there hain't no reason why we can't visit the island if the chief mate lets us; but I'm thinkin' he won't."

"I don't see why not, if the calm continues," said Val. "I'm going to speak to Professor Scotchley about it. Captain Rynders, if he was well, would let us explore the island under present circumstances. He put in at three islands to oblige the professor when there was wind enough to keep on."

"The chief mate don't look at things the same way the cap'n does. He hain't got no likin' for sich things as the professor collects. I heard him say sich rot ought to be tossed overboard."

"Then you think he won't let us go ashore on that island in the morning?" said Val.

"Ye might try him, for I'd like to set foot on that there place myself ag'in."

"Tom, Professor Scotchley and the mate are on the poop smoking. Better go up there now and see whether you can work the raffle," said Val.

Tom went on the poop and was gone about ten minutes.

"The mate said he'd anchor off the island and let us have a boat to go ashore in the morning, if the calm holds," he said, when he rejoined Val and Jack Junk.

"Good!" replied his chum. "We must get up early so as to lose no time."

The sailor seemed well pleased at the prospect of revisiting the island on which he had been wrecked, and he left the boys, saying that he was going to turn in.

Val and Tom returned to the bulwark and remained some time gazing at the distant island, which appeared to grow larger as time passed, a fact indicating that the ship was fast drifting toward it.

"We'll be close in to it before sunrise at this rate," said Val.

"Looks like it," replied Tom.

"Say, do you believe Jack's yarn about pirate treasure being hidden on the island?"

"I don't know whether I do or not," responded Tom. "Seems kind of fishy."

"Whether it's there or not, we're not likely to find it."

"That's true enough. I sha'n't worry about it in any case."

"It would be a great thing for us if we did stumble upon it," said Val. "A share of it would come in mighty handy for me. Mother and I could stand a little prosperity."

"I'd be glad if we did find it for your sake, old man. But I'm afraid if we were so fortunate all hands aboard from Hop Hi up would insist on having a whack at it, so that, counting the professor, it would have to be divided into about eighteen parts."

"I'm thinking that the chief mate would want the biggest slice himself. To say the honest truth, I don't like that man for a cent. If Captain Rynders dies he'll be the captain for the balance of the voyage, and all the way back to Frisco as well. In that case it's my opinion that things will be much different aboard."

"Oh, well, he'll have to treat us decent, for our passage is paid to Sydney and back."

The boys talked together awhile longer, and then went to their stateroom and turned in for the night, leaving the door open and the deadlight as well.

CHAPTER III.

THE CURTAIN FALLS ON CAPTAIN RYNDERS.

Val awoke with the dawn and punched his chum into wakefulness.

They tumbled out on deck just as the sun was beginning to tint the blue water with purple and gold.

The Island of the Seven Craters, a mass of green and luxuriant vegetation, like an emerald on a glass setting, lay broad on the vessel's starboard bow, less than half a mile away.

Three of the seven peaks were throwing off a dark smoke, which rose straight up into the morning air.

The ship, though not anchored, was perfectly motionless, not a breath of wind ruffling her sails as they hung limply from her yards.

The sailors, who had just finished washing down the deck under the direction of the second mate, were now gathered around the galley, where Hop Hi was pouring out coffee into their tin cups.

"Gee! That's a fine looking island, all right," said Tom, as the two boys gazed on the truly wonderful picture presented to their eyes.

The seven conical elevations rose clear and well-defined out of the tropical verdure which covered the entire base of the island.

Here and there were abrupt precipices, crags of rocks frowning down like olden battlements, peaks shattered into strange forms, and deep ravines, down which could be seen streams of water falling headlong, glittering in the sunshine like silver lines upon a block of jet, or spreading, like a sheet of glass, over bare rocks.

The rough, yet romantic scene, was mellowed down by the softer features of rich vales, cocoanut groves, clumps of dark chestnuts, stately palms and breadfruit, patches of graceful bananas, mingling in great luxuriance and forming with the wild reef scenery of the shore, and far-stretching ocean beyond and around, pictures of surprising beauty.

Jack Junk saw the boys admiring the island and approached them with a grin.

"What d'ye think of it, my hearties?" he said.

"It's a dandy," replied Val, enthusiastically. "A fellow has got to get away from home to see such sights as this."

"We'll go ashore after breakfast," said Tom, "and make a day of it, for I don't believe there'll be any wind before sunset, if then."

"You can't tell nothin' about that," responded Junk. "I've seen jest sich a mornin' as this, in this here latitude, wind up in a snortin' gale that nearly took the ship's masts out of her, and set her to leakin' like an old sieve."

"I'd like to bet there won't be any storm around here to-day. I never saw a finer morning, did you, Val?"

"No, I don't think I have; but it will be blazing hot by and by."

"What do we care after we get over yonder into the shade of those groves?"

"It's lucky we have the island to take refuge on," said Val. "I hope the vessel remains here till a breeze springs up."

"That's a funny remark," laughed Val. "How is she going to get away without wind? Is the anchor down, Jack?"

The sailor shook his head.

"There hain't no need of an anchor jest now. The hooker is out of the current. She'll lie here all day if the calm holds."

"Then I hope the calm holds till night, at any rate," said Tom, thinking of the fine time he and Val expected to have on the island.

"You haven't said nothin' to the perfessor or the mate about that there pirate gold, have yer?" asked Jack Junk.

"Not a word," replied Tom.

"That's right. We'll look for it together."

"Have you any idea where to look?" asked Val, with some eagerness.

The sailor shut one eye and assumed a wise air.

"Mebbe I have, and then ag'in mebbe I haven't," he answered, slyly.

His manner, however, indicated a whole lot, and greatly excited the boys.

"Suppose we found it, how would we divide?" asked Tom.

"One-half to me and the other half 'tween you two."

"If it amounted to much how would we be able to get it aboard the ship without attracting attention to it?" asked Val.

"You leave that there matter to me," returned the sailor.

At that moment Mr. Gotch, the first mate, came up the companion-stairs, facing the wheel, and walked to the break of the poop.

He was followed by the second mate, who, to the eyes of the boys, looked unusually solemn.

Val, Tom and Jack Junk were standing at the starboard bulwark in the waist, and they looked up as the chief mate called the men aft.

Evidently there was something in the wind.

In a few words Mr. Gotch announced that Captain Rynders was dead, and that he had assumed command of the ship.

His communication was received in solemn silence.

There wasn't a jack tar aboard but regretted the loss of the man most of them had sailed under for a number of years.

This was Mr. Gotch's first trip on the ship, and so far he had not made himself popular.

After saying all he had to communicate to the crew he dismissed them, and the men broke up into groups and retired toward the forecabin.

"Say, Tom, this is tough," said Val. "Captain Rynders was a fine man, all right, and it's a blamed pity he had to die away out here in the South Pacific."

"That's right. I suppose he'll be buried on the island. That's much better than dumping him overboard as would have been done if we were out of sight of land."

"The new skipper may not go to the trouble of sendin' him ashore for plantin'," said the sailor.

"Why not?" asked Val. "It would be an outrage not to do it when we're alongside of the island."

Junk shrugged his shoulders as if it was a matter of indifference to him how the late captain's body was disposed of.

"Captain Rynders has a wife and family in Frisco, and they would probably want to have his body brought to California. This couldn't be done if he was sunk in the ocean; but it might be managed if he was buried on the island," said Val.

"Things has got to go as the new skipper says," replied Junk.

"Well, we'll get Professor Scotchley to remonstrate with him if he orders the captain's body to be thrown overboard."

The sailor grinned, but made no answer.

Since the announcement of Captain Rynders' death, a pall seemed to hang over the ship, and the boys felt as if half the pleasure of their expected day's outing on the island was already spoiled.

Jack Junk walked away, and they talked together in low tones until the Chinese cook told them breakfast was on the table.

Mr. Gotch, the second mate and Professor Scotchley were already seated at the table when the boys entered the cabin and took their places.

The meal was eaten in silence, even the professor having nothing to say, which was unusual for him.

At the conclusion of it the new captain sent for the sailmaker and told him to have Captain Rynders' body sewn up in canvas and otherwise prepared for immediate burial, which was compulsory owing to the heat of that latitude.

"Aren't you going to bury Captain Rynders on the island?" said Val, with some indignation in his tones.

"No," replied the new commander, shortly.

"Why not?" demanded the boy.

Mr. Gotch flashed an ugly look at him.

"Mind your own business, young man," he said, sharply, "and I'll attend to mine."

"But you've no right to throw him overboard when you can just as well bury him ashore," remonstrated Val. "Common decency——"

Mr. Gotch's face grew red with passion.

"I am master of this ship, and I want no criticism from you, you young monkey. Do you understand?"

Val, who was a plucky boy, was about to make an angry retort when Professor Scotchley interfered.

"Val, you have no right to question Mr. Gotch's arrangements," he said. "He is the captain of the ship now, and is responsible for his own actions."

Val subsided, but he met the new captain's look with one of defiance which only widened the breach between them.

Val and Tom were not the only ones who objected to the late captain being interred in the ocean.

When the sailmaker had received his orders, and went forward to get a suitable piece of canvas to make a shroud of, the news spread among the crew.

The men held a consultation, the result of which was a committee of the rough tars waited on Mr. Gotch with the request that the captain's body might be turned over to them for burial on the island.

The spokesman received an insulting refusal, and the

committee retired to report the unsuccessful result of their mission.

A feeling of resentment and discontent spread through the crew, which was noticed by the second mate and reported to his new commander.

Mr. Gotch went on the poop at once and called the crew aft.

"Look here, my lads," he said, in a threatening way, "I'm a man of few words, as mayhaps you have already learned since we've been together. I'm the captain of this ship and what I say goes every time. If any man jack of you objects to the way I attend to business I'll clap him in irons and keep him in the hold till we reach Sydney, where I'll turn him over to the authorities for punishment. I want you all to understand that I'll stand no nonsense. If you mean to behave yourselves well to me, I'll treat you fair and square. If you don't, why, then," he looked around upon the men with a black expression, and punctuated his speech with an imprecation that made the boys' blood run cold, "I'll give you a dose of discipline that'll make you wish you had never been born. That's all I've got to say. Now, go for'ard."

The crew dispersed rather sullenly.

They didn't fancy the way the new skipper inaugurated his authority over them, and his attitude looked ominous for the future.

Still they recognized the fact that they couldn't help themselves.

They must grin and bear it or take the consequences, for the maritime law was all on the side of the captain of the ship.

It was different with Val and Tom.

The captain had no right to ride rough-shod over them.

At the same time they forgot that even as passengers they were subject to his authority, and he had the power to make things very unpleasant for them without much danger of being called to account for his conduct.

Mr. Gotch walked up and down the poop under the awning in very bad humor.

Ever and anon he cast a menacing glance at Valentine Vance, who was standing by the rail looking at the island and talking to Tom.

The words the lad had spoken to him at the breakfast table rankled in his breast and he was trying to think how he could get square with him.

While he was turning the matter over in his mind the sailmaker reported that he had finished his job.

All that remained to be done was to carry the body out into the waist, place it on a plank, tie a heavy bar of pig iron to its feet, and let it slide overboard into its watery grave.

Mr. Gotch walked to the end of the poop, intending to summon the hands to witness the burial of Captain Rynders, when his sharp eye noticed a peculiar haze advancing along the horizon.

He turned on his heel, descended to the cabin and looked at the barometer.

He saw indications there of a sudden change in the weather.

When he returned to the poop there was a malicious grin on his countenance.

He gave orders to get the long boat in readiness for lowering.

Then he called Val over to where he stood.

"Since you seem to take a great interest in the disposal of the late captain's body, young man," he said, fixing an evil look on the lad, "I've decided to let you have your way. You and your friend, and one sailor to row the boat, shall take the corpse ashore and bury it where you please. Then I hope you'll be satisfied."

"Do you mean that, Mr. Gotch?" asked Val, in a tone of surprise.

"I do. Look yonder and you will see that I have given orders for the lowering of the long boat. The body of the captain will be put aboard of her immediately and the rest will be up to you."

"I accept the responsibility. Professor Scotchley will go with us to read the service for the dead over the grave, and I believe we already have your permission to remain on shore while the calm lasts."

The new captain glanced again at the distant haze and nodded.

Val notified Tom and the professor of the change in Mr. Gotch's arrangements, and asked them to get ready to make the trip with him.

Tom expressed his satisfaction that the late captain had escaped a watery grave, and willingly consented to help bury him on the island.

The boys went to their stateroom, little thinking that it was for the last time.

They strapped belts around their waists containing a revolver and a bowie knife.

Tom also took his rifle and a belt of loaded cartridges.

The professor provided himself with a pair of field-glasses, a bag for carrying specimens, and a hooped net attached to a long pole for capturing butterflies if he ran across any.

They heard a cheer on deck as the crew expressed their satisfaction when the mate called them aft and said that Captain Rynders was to be buried on the island.

When they walked out on deck they saw four of the sailors bearing the body to the boat, while the others stood uncovered out of respect to the deceased.

The canvas-shrouded corpse was reverently placed in the boat, the boys and the professor stepped in, followed by Jack Junk.

In the bottom of the boat lay two shovels.

"Cast off, my hearty," said Junk, who was in the bows, to Val, who sat in the stern.

The boy unhooked the tackle at his end, while the sailor attended to his.

Junk then picked up the oars and began to row toward the island, while Mr. Gotch, the second mate, Hop Hi and the sailors watched the boat speed shoreward.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE ISLAND OF THE SEVEN CRATERS.

The line of the shore toward which the boat was making was broken up into numerous small coves.

The boat was headed for the largest of these coves.

It was only a short trip from the ship, and presently the bow of the boat grated on the sand.

Jack Junk stepped out and tied the painter to a tropical tree which was growing close to the water's edge.

Professor Scotchley got out next.

While the sailor took hold of the feet of the corpse the boys lifted the head and shoulders, and in this manner the remains of the late skipper was removed to the beach and then carried up to the edge of the thick vegetation beyond.

The boys then returned for the shovels, and the party entered the tropical foliage to find a suitable spot to dig a grave.

They had not far to go before they came upon a romantic looking glade which Val decided would be just the place to inter Captain Rynders.

The weather by this time was decidedly sultry, and the exertion of digging a hole in the earth brought the perspiration out in great drops on the boys' bodies.

When the job was finished they were glad to sit down and cool off while Junk and the professor went back to the beach to bring up the captain's body.

The corpse was dropped feet first into the hole, and lowered backward with the aid of a rope under the shoulders.

The rope was withdrawn and then Professor Scotchley read the funeral service from the late skipper's own book, after which the earth was filled in and a mound raised over the top.

"We ought to have brought a board for a headstone," said Val, when all was over.

"Maybe we'll get the chance to do that before sunset," said Tom. "We can paint his name and other particulars, except his age, which we don't know, upon it."

"Well, let's take a look around the island now," suggested Val. "It's uninhabited, isn't it, Jack?" he added, turning to the sailor.

"I don't see nobdoy on it when I was here before," replied Junk, with a grin.

"Whereabouts were you wrecked?"

"On the northern shore."

"And which shore is this?"

"The southwest."

"You weren't the only one wrecked here, were you?"

"No. There were six of us. There's a big reef around that end of the island. Our hooker was driven slap on to it in a howlin' gale, and we swum across the sheltered inlet and saved our bacon."

Professor Scotchley was surprised to learn that Junk had been wrecked on that island once upon a time.

He asked for some of the particulars, and the sailor told quite a story of the wreck of the bark he was in at the time, their life on the island, where they remained several months, and finally their rescue by a British ship that put in for water.

While he was telling his yarn they had been walking through the thick tropical vegetation that surrounded them on every side.

The story was interrupted several times while the professor chased and captured several butterflies that were new to him, and which would greatly enrich his already large collection of the same species.

The boys kept on the alert for something to shoot at, but saw nothing larger than small birds of brilliant plumage, which they hadn't the heart to attempt to slaughter.

"Were you ever at this end of the island before, Jack?"

"No."

"Whereabouts do you think that treasure is?" continued the boy, in a low tone.

"Somewhere around the north end."

"That's rather indefinite."

"Well, I don't know prezactly. I only have an idee."

"What gave you the idea?"

"What that chap said to me the time I met him in Peru."

"What did he say about the location of the pirate hoard?"

"He said it was hidden in the foot of one of the crater hills."

"At the north end?"

"That's the way I understood him."

"Why didn't you get more definite directions?"

"He couldn't give 'em himself, or he wouldn't. Besides, I never expected to see this here island anyway."

"Then we'll have to examine the three craters that appear to be at the north end. That will take some time. I'm afraid we'll never be able to do it and get back to the ship before sundown."

"What's the diff'rence if we don't get back?" said Junk, as if he felt assured there was no need of hurry on their part. "The hooker won't run off and leave us here. You've paid yer passage to Sydney and back, and the new skipper has got to carry ye there and then return ye to Frisco."

"But if a favorable wind should come up Mr. Gotch would be as mad as a hornet if we were not on board."

The sailor grinned.

"He's a tartar, and there'll be somethin' doin' before the voyage is over, or my name isn't Jack Junk."

They reached a banana grove, and the delicious fruit tempted their palates.

The wide spreading leaves also afforded shade, and they were glad to sit down and take it easy for awhile, for they were perspiring as if in a Turkish bath.

While they were eating and resting Val suddenly noticed the peculiar appearance of the sun, now almost over their heads.

He called the attention of Jack Junk to it.

The sailor uttered an exclamation and sprang to his feet.

"There's a gale comin', and it's goin' to be a snorter."

"A gale!" gasped the boys. "Why, it's as calm as it was when we left the ship."

"We'll never be able to reach the old hooker before it's on her. She'll be driven miles and miles away to sea, and it may be two or three days, or a week, before she kin get back. I reckon we'll be marooned, my hearties, for about that time."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the boys, looking at each other in a kind of consternation. "Do you mean that, Jack?"

"I don't mean nothin' else. Listen! Do ye hear that hummin' sound? It's comin'. There'll be thunder, and lightnin', and wind, and rain to burn in a few minutes."

The boys listened and heard the low, mysterious sound, like the buzz of a top.

That, with the sailor's earnestness, fully impressed the party with a sense of coming trouble.

"Where shall we go for shelter?" asked Val, looking around.

"I saw something like a cave over in that crater hill yonder before we entered this grove," said Tom, pointing.

"Then we want to get there before the rain comes on," said Val.

The sailor agreed that it would be the proper place for them to seek, for he said when it rained in that latitude it came down in barrels full.

Accordingly they took up their line of march for the spot indicated by Tom.

As soon as they got out of the grove they saw the dark aperture in the side of the bristly-looking hill, and it proved to be a cave of some kind.

By the time they reached it the sun was entirely hidden by a thick layer of haze, and the distant hum had grown in volume, like the subdued roar of some mighty cataract.

Not a breath of air was stirring as yet, while the heat was now simply stifling.

It was as if they were standing in a superheated room of a great factory, where a thousand machines were humming in the next apartment.

"This is something we didn't look for, Val," said Tom. "I wanted to bet early this morning that there wouldn't be the ghost of a storm to-day. In fact, I would have bet there wouldn't even be any wind before sunset."

"Strange things seem to happen in these latitudes," said Val. "It looks as if we are going to remain on this island for two or three days."

"What's the difference, so long as we don't starve? I'd just as soon have a change as not. I'm dead tired of the ship. This voyage is altogether too long to suit me. If you hadn't come along with me I should be bored to death."

While they were speaking the air grew darker and the sound of the coming gale perceptibly increased.

"I hope the ship won't be driven ashore on the island," said Val, suddenly. "What do you think, Jack?" added the boy, a bit anxiously.

"I reckon she'll be all right if she holds together," replied the sailor, who did not appear to be greatly concerned about the vessel.

"If she holds together!" exclaimed Val. "Is there any danger of her not holding together?"

"Ye can't tell nothin' about it," answered Jack Junk. "Ye may thank yer stars that ye're not aboard of her, for it hain't no way sartin she won't go to the bottom before this here gale blows out."

"And if she did go to the bottom, what will become of us?"

"We're sartin to be alive and kickin', at any rate, which ye kin be thankful for."

"How could we get off this island if the Golden Gate was lost?"

The sailor shrugged his shoulders.

"Have to stay here, like I did before, till somethin' come along and took us off."

That piece of intelligence was not very consoling to the boys.

And while they were considering it the gale suddenly swept down upon the island like a million of shrieking fiends.

The air grew almost as dark as night.

Then followed thunder, lightning and rain, the like of which they had never seen before.

It seemed as if the storm king was tearing things up by the roots generally.

It was pandemonium broke loose, and no mistake.

CHAPTER V.

THE GALE.

Bad as the boys thought it was, they would have found it a great deal worse had their cave overlooked the ocean.

They were in a sheltered valley, and outside the rain, which came down in torrents, they only got a mild idea of the strength of the wind which was blowing outside.

The ocean, half an hour before as smooth as a sheet of glass, was now convulsed into gigantic billows that lashed the shore line with a roar which the boys heard, but could not appreciate.

The outlook seaward was sublime, and rather terrifying to one unused to such sights.

The ship Golden Gate had disappeared.

She had been swept beyond the end of the island, and was now battling for her existence with the gale, miles away to the southwest.

The storm continued to rage furiously, and the party sat in the cave and watched what they could see of it.

The lightning was of the most dazzling character, accompanied by terrific peals of thunder that seemed to shake the island to its foundations.

"This is a corker, for fair," said Tom. "I wonder how long it'll last?"

Jack Junk volunteered the information that it was liable to last well into the night, perhaps till the following morning, and maybe even longer.

"If it does we don't eat then," said Val. "We'll be hungry enough to-morrow morning to eat a bunch of bananas, skin, leaves, stalk and all."

"I hope we won't have to subsist on bananas alone while we stay here," said Tom. "I like variety in my food as well as in everything else."

Jack Junk assured him that there was other good fruit on the island, as well as shellfish along shore.

"If we had fishin' lines, my hearty, we could catch fish in the inlet to the north, too."

"But we couldn't eat them raw. How would we cook them?"

"We need a fire, that's true," admitted the sailor.

"Oh, we can raise the fire, for I've matches in my jeans."

"Then we're all right, my laddybuck," replied Junk.

"Are we? I don't see it. We have no frying-pan nor—"

"Ye don't want none. Fish kin be baked to a turn in hot ashes. The natives wrap 'em up in mud jackets and roast 'em in the embers of the fire."

"But we haven't any salt, nor pepper, nor—"

"Ye'll l'arn to git along without them things if ye stay long on the island."

Professor Scotchley inquired of the sailor what he thought about the fate of the ship in that gale.

Junk was of the opinion she'd ride it out safely and come back after them in due time.

While it is true that the professor sympathized with those on board the vessel at that moment, he was also much concerned about his specimens in his stateroom.

He wondered what shape he would find them in when the ship came back to the island after the gale.

Had he known that he was never to see those specimens again he would have had a fit.

The storm never let up a bit during the rest of that day, although there were times when the rain ceased almost entirely.

The party had no idea of the lapse of time.

The professor had a watch in good running order on his person, but he couldn't see its face, and both boys declined to waste a match, for their supply was limited and might yet become worth their weight in gold.

"This is becoming monotonous," said Tom, after the lapse of a couple of hours, and no indications were apparent of a change for the better. "I'm getting hungry, too. I wish we'd brought a supply of bananas to the cave. I could chew on one, or a dozen, for that matter, with all the pleasure in the world."

"I wouldn't mind a banana myself," replied Val. "It's not raining so hard now, though the storm seems as bad as ever, we might run over to the banana grove and get a bunch."

"It's too dark. There, it's beginning to pour again. We've got to go hungry."

Another hour passed away, and still the storm howled over the island.

By that time all hands were hungry in dead earnest.

But they had to grin and bear it as best they could.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, but seemed like seven at night.

Jack Junk was the least affected of any of the party, for he was accustomed to hardship, and a little thing like a few hours' fast didn't bother him anything to speak of.

Professor Scotchley took refuge in his thoughts, which were always a solace to him when things were running out of their accustomed groove.

"I reckon this here storm will give us time to hunt for that there treasure," said Jack Junk. "The old hooker won't be back here for a couple of days, and mebbe we kin find out somethin' by that time."

"But you must have done some hunting for it when you were here ten years ago," said Val. "And you had four or five months to do it in. If you didn't make any discoveries in all that time how do you expect we will succeed any better in the short space of two days?"

"We kin try, can't we?" replied the sailor, doggedly.

"Sure, we can try, but I'm afraid that's all it will amount to."

"Besides, the hooker may not git back in two days, or four days, either," said Jack.

"But somebody will have to watch for her."

"The peffessor kin do that."

"We can't expect Professor Scotchley to remain alone at the south side of the island while we're knocking around at the opposite end a mile away," said Val.

"We kin arrange it some way, I reckon," persisted the sailor.

"After all, there may be no treasure on this island," put in Tom.

"Yes, there is," replied Jack Junk, with a positive nod.

"You couldn't swear to it."

"Yes, I kin swear to it."

"How can you when you've only the word of that chap you met in Peru?"

"He knew what he was talkin' about. The Spanish Government believed Vasco's gold was here, for they sent two expeditions to search for it."

"And you're sure they didn't find it?"

"Not a nickel's worth."

"Didn't other people search for it, too?"

"Yes. More'n a dozen has been after it at odd times."

"How do you know but one of them found and carried it off?" said Tom.

Jack didn't know, but he didn't believe they had.

"If all these persons made a systematic search for the treasure and failed to locate it, I don't see where we come in."

Tom's arguments were all good, but Jack Junk wouldn't listen to them with any patience, because they didn't fall in with his views.

He had the idea firmly imbedded in his head that Vasco's treasure was still on the island, and no amount of argument would shake his faith in that fact.

He and the boys talked about the pirate gold until the latter, at any rate, were tired of the subject.

As the storm still went on as bad as ever, they philosophically cut supper out of the programme, and lying down on the sandy floor of the cave tried to forget the seriousness of their situation.

When night came on a couple of hours later, the blackness of the sky only got denser, and the gale continued to rage with full force.

The boys fell asleep after awhile and did not awaken until morning broke.

By that time the gale had spent its force, and had already much abated.

But it was not a bright, glorious morning like the preceding one.

The sky was still dark, and the clouds were chasing each other wildly.

There was neither sun nor blue sky to be seen.

It still rained, but only at intervals, and the earth was soft and spongy.

"The storm is nearly over, isn't it, Val?" asked Tom.

"It looks pretty dark outside, but I guess it's clearing up all right."

"Where's Professor Scotchley?"

"He's snoozing away over in the corner."

"And Jack Junk—where is he?"

"I don't see him. Gone out to investigate the weather, perhaps."

Val stepped outside and presently caught sight of the sailor coming from the banana grove with a big bunch of the luscious fruit over his shoulder.

"Here he comes with our breakfast," said Val.

Tom was by his companion's side in a minute.

"Breakfast is what I'm looking for," he said, eagerly. "I'm hungry enough to eat anything in the shape of food."

"I'm in the same boat. I don't know when I have gone so long without having a meal. A nice, juicy steak, some fried potatoes and coffee would go fine now," said Val.

"Oh, lor', don't talk about such delicacies, you make my mouth water."

"Here ye are, my hearties," said Jack Junk, throwing

down the bunch of fruit. "Help yourself. There's plenty more where they come from."

"What about the weather, Jack?" asked Val, with his mouth full of banana.

"Clearin'. The sun'll be out before long."

"That's good news. I'm sick of being cooped up in this cave."

Professor Scotchley now woke up and he came forward to get his share of the fruit.

He made inquiries about the weather, too, and asked Jack when he thought the ship would be back.

The sailor couldn't say when she would be back.

To tell the truth, he hoped she might not return for a week.

The boys wanted to go back to the cove where they landed to make sure that the Golden Gate hadn't been driven ashore and wrecked on the island.

Professor Scotchley was also interested in the matter, so, after all hands had satisfied their hunger, they took up their line of march for the shore under the lead of the sailor.

They found the little cove, the day before so beautiful, was now a mass of foaming and tumultuous waves, and the surf was thrown for many yards upon the beach.

The horizon was confused—they could not distinguish the line between the water and the sky, and the whole shore of the island, as far as they could see, was lined with a white foam.

There was no sign of wreckage anywhere, which would have been the case had the ship gone on the rocks, so the conclusion was that she had been blown away from the island, and they might hope to see her later on.

CHAPTER VI.

RUBY FOSTER.

"Well, what's the programme now?" asked Tom, after they had satisfied their curiosity with respect to the shore.

"What do you say, Jack?" asked Val.

"Well, my hearties, I'm for crusin' over to the north end of the island."

No objection being offered to this suggestion, the party started in that direction.

The walking was soft, as might be expected after the drenching the island had received, but did not greatly impede their progress.

They were treated to a continuous shower-bath, however, from the foliage through which they passed, and were pretty damp after they had walked a quarter of a mile.

Then they came out into a wide open space, thickly carpeted with a brilliantly green vegetation.

They could see the seven crater peaks very plainly now, and the smoke issuing from three of them.

They formed a sort of cordon around the island, with wide breaks between them, the center of the island being practically a luxuriant valley.

The island was about a mile long and perhaps half a mile at its widest point.

It was now about nine o'clock, and the sun was struggling for an opening between the flying, slate-colored clouds that covered the heavens.

The air was fairly cool for that latitude, and afforded

the party great relief after the sweltering they had got from the calm.

"I wouldn't mind living here for awhile if I had all I wanted to eat," said Tom. "Nothing like feeling the solid ground under you, after all."

"I should like it, too, provided I had something to occupy my mind."

"We've got the pirate gold to interest us."

"I have very little confidence in that."

"Don't you believe it's here?"

"It may be here, but if so it's hidden too securely for us to find it. After all those expeditions failed to locate it there is small chance for us to hit on it."

"Well, we can amuse ourselves searching for it, at any rate," replied Tom.

They were now approaching the shore of the northeastern part of the island.

Val was carrying Tom's rifle, and the two boys were in the lead.

Suddenly the entire party were startled by the shrill scream of a woman.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Val. "A woman on the island, and in trouble!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a second scream rang out.

"Come on, Tom. We must see what's in the wind," cried Val, starting off in the direction of the sound.

A third scream added energy to the boys' footsteps, and they pushed their way through the tropical verdure as fast as they could.

It sounded quite near, and was mingled with the coarse and threatening ejaculations of a man.

At length Val, who was in the lead, emerged from the edge of the grove into a clear space that led down to the sea.

A few yards before him he saw a lovely young girl struggling in the arms of a bewhiskered man, who was dressed like the mate of a vessel.

The girl was pretty strong and put up a good fight, but when Val reached the scene her strength was giving out, and she uttered another piercing scream.

"Scream away, my pretty bird," laughed the man, maliciously. "I mean to have a kiss—ay, a dozen of them—in spite of your resistance. You're in my power and might as well yield first as last."

"Hold on there, you rascal!" cried Val, bringing his gun down from his shoulder. "What are you about?"

Val's unexpected appearance on the scene so astonished the man that he mechanically released his grasp of the girl, who at once took advantage of her opportunity and broke entirely away from him.

"Save me! Save me!" she cried, rushing wildly toward the boy.

"Sure, I'll save you, miss," said Val. "I won't let him harm you, you may be sure."

The man recovered himself, stared in an ugly way at the boy, and then with an imprecation drew a revolver from his pocket and started to advance upon Val.

"Stop!" cried the boy, in a tone that showed he meant business. "Drop that revolver or I'll fire at you."

As Val covered the fellow with his rifle the girl fell exhausted at his feet.

At the same time Tom made his appearance from the grove.

The rascal, perceiving that the odds were against him, came to a halt, but nevertheless held on to his weapon in a dogged way.

"Drop that gun or I'll drop you!" said Val, resolutely.

Tom, seeing the state of affairs, concluded to chip in, too.

"Throw that revolver down!" he said, drawing his own weapon.

The man hesitated, while his eyes flashed fire.

"Who are you and where did you come from?" he asked, in an ugly tone.

"No matter who we are nor where we come from," retorted Val. "We are going to protect this young lady from you. I'll ask you once more to drop your weapon. If you don't you'll take the consequences."

With another imprecation the rascal threw his weapon down.

"Go and take possession of it, Tom," said Val, "and see that he doesn't get away, while I find out what the trouble is."

After Tom had taken charge of the man's pistol and then advised him to remain quietly where he was, Val lowered his gun and turned to the girl.

"Don't be frightened, miss," he said. "My friend and I will protect you from further harm. Will you tell me who you are, and how you come to be on this island?"

"My name is Ruby Foster," sobbed the girl. "My father's vessel was wrecked on this island two weeks ago. Everybody was lost except my father, that man, who was the mate, and myself. My father's leg was broken and he is unable to get around. He is in a cave near here. That man, whose name is Edward Fox, has been annoying me with his attentions ever since we've been on the island. I was going to a place where we get water when he came up behind me, grabbed me and tried to kiss me. I screamed, though I thought there was no one to help me. I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't saved me from him. I am very grateful to you for doing so."

"You're welcome. I am glad I got here in time to be of service to you. That man shan't bother you any more while we remain on the island, and when our vessel returns to take us off we'll take you and your father with us."

"Did your vessel go away and leave you and that other boy here?"

The girl regarded him in some surprise as she spoke.

"I'll tell you how it was," explained Val. "Our ship, the Golden Gate, bound from San Francisco to Sydney, was becalmed off this island yesterday morning. The captain died during the night and four of us brought the body ashore to bury it. While we were here the storm came up and blew the vessel off somewhere, but of course she'll be back after us inside of a couple of days. That's the whole story in a few words."

"I am so glad there is a chance for us to get away from this place. Father will be very glad to hear it, too. You must come with me, both of you, and I'll make you acquainted with my father. He'll be glad to see you, for I am his only companion, as Mr. Fox has little to say to him."

"We'll come in a few minutes, as soon as Professor Scotchley and Jack Junk come up. Let that man go, Tom," he added to his companion. "What was the name

of your father's vessel, Miss Foster, where was she from, and where bound?"

"She was a brig named the Lady of the Lake. We were bound to San Francisco from Sydney with a cargo of coal. We went ashore here in a gale during the night. We had a crew of eight men with a cook, a carpenter and two mates. Mr. Fox was the chief mate. All the others were lost, either washed overboard when the brig struck, or in trying to swim for the shore."

When the girl finished her brief story Val told the girl his name and introduced Tom.

At that juncture Professor Scotchley and Jack Junk appeared.

The mate, Fox, had walked away and was out of sight, but they were greatly astonished to see Val and Tom in company with a young girl whose age was apparently between sixteen and seventeen.

Val introduced Ruby Foster to the professor, and hastened to explain matters.

The party then, under the girl's guidance, started for the cave where her father lay helpless from his broken limb, which he had received the night of the wreck.

CHAPTER VII.

VAL AND TOM MAKE THEMSELVES GENERALLY USEFUL.

The cave into which Ruby Foster introduced Val and the others, while not exactly facing the sea, was close to it.

It penetrated the base of one of the crater cones from which no smoke arose.

It was really a series of caverns, as Val and Tom afterward discovered.

The outer one was the largest, and there, on a bed of soft vegetable fiber, lay Captain Foster, Ruby's father.

The cave was filled with a lot of stuff that had come ashore from a wreck of the brig—boxes, and kegs, and rope, and a miscellaneous collection of other things, many of them very useful to the three castaways.

Captain Foster was astonished when his daughter introduced four strangers into the cave.

He immediately jumped to the conclusion that some vessel had anchored off the island, probably in quest of water, which abounded on the place.

"Father," said Ruby, "this is Valentine Vance."

"Glad to meet you, young man," replied the captain, cheerfully, extending his mahogany-hued hand.

The girl then introduced the others in the party.

"I presume you are from a vessel that put in here for water?" said Captain Foster.

"No, sir. We were marooned here by yesterday's gale," replied Val.

"Marooned here by yesterday's gale?" exclaimed Captain Foster, in surprise. "I don't quite comprehend your meaning, young man."

Then Val told him how they came to be on the island.

He went into more details than he had told the girl, and Captain Foster and his daughter soon understood the situation thoroughly.

"I hope you will remain here with us until your vessel returns," said the captain, in a hospitable manner. "We will be very glad of your society."

Val, who acted as spokesman for his party, told Captain

Foster that they would be very glad to accept his invitation, as they had no place to go, and that it would be ever so much better for the whole party to hang together.

"You may consider that your stay on the island will be short, as the *Golden Gate* will undoubtedly be back shortly to take us off. Of course you'll have to return to Sydney, but that cannot well be avoided."

"It will make little difference to us, since the brig is lost," replied the bluff skipper. "We will manage to get back to the United States by steamer. My vessel and cargo were fully insured, so that my loss will not be very considerable. She was an old craft, and I have been thinking of disposing of her and buying a more serviceable vessel, or retiring from active service altogether."

"It was fortunate that you and your daughter escaped with your lives," said Val.

"It was, indeed, and we feel very grateful to Heaven. With the exception of my chief mate, Mr. Fox, every other soul was lost. Where is Mr. Fox, Ruby?"

"Don't ask me, father. I don't know where he is, and I don't care if I never see him again," she replied, with some indignation in her tones.

"Why, what do you mean, Ruby?" asked Captain Foster, in surprise.

The girl then explained the indignity which the chief mate had subjected her to, and how Val and his friend Tom had saved her from his undesirable familiarity.

The captain expressed his disapprobation of his mate's ungentlemanly actions, and said he would certainly call him to account for it when he saw him again.

He thanked Val for his plucky interposition in his daughter's behalf, and said he would not forget it.

Val and Tom then walked outside with Ruby, leaving Professor Scotchley and Jack Junk with the injured captain of the *Lady of the Lake*.

Ruby seemed delighted with the companionship of two boys about her own age, and she was especially taken with Val, not only because he had taken her part when she was in serious trouble, but because he was a good-looking and manly young fellow.

Val was equally struck with her.

She was an uncommonly pretty girl, with sapphire-blue eyes, and fluffy golden hair.

Her naturally fair complexion was browned by exposure to the sun and winds of the ocean, and the ruddy hue of perfect health glowed on her cheeks.

She was very vivacious, and not in the least degree bashful.

The three were soon on the best of terms.

Before they were an hour together the boys had told her all about themselves, and she had been equally confidential with them.

Her mother was dead, and the modest home in the Western Addition of San Francisco, where she had been born, was rented during the absence of herself and father on their long voyage.

This was the second voyage she had made with her father, and its unfortunate termination tempted her to believe that it would be the last if she could persuade her parent to give up the sea for good.

Val told her how this island had once been the rendezvous of the Spanish pirate, Vasco the Terrible, and that

it was believed by many people that his treasure of pillaged gold and other valuables was still secreted somewhere on the place, probably in one of the unknown caves of the seven craters.

"Jack Junk, the sailor with us, was wrecked here like yourself ten years ago. He hunted for that gold during the months of his enforced residence, but he did not succeed in getting even a clue to it. He wants us to help him make another search, and we're going to do it, if for no other purpose than to pass away the time while we're here," said Val.

"There is another cave behind the one in which we have taken refuge," said Ruby. "I looked in at the opening one day, but it was so dark and forbidding that I didn't dare think of exploring it."

"We'll take a look at it," said Val. "What do you say, Tom?"

"Sure. I'm with you."

"You will have to have a light of some kind," said the girl. "There may be holes in it into which you might tumble and go down ever so deep."

"We'll make some kind of torches," said Val.

"You can do that easily," she answered. "A barrel of tar came ashore from the brig which papa expected to use for signaling the first vessel that hove in sight. By smearing the ends of a couple of pieces of wood in the stuff and applying a light to the tar you will have excellent torches, though they will give off a lot of strong smoke."

"We'll furnish the light, for we have a small supply of matches," said Tom.

"Oh, we have matches, too. We got lots of things from the wreck before she broke up. Mr. Fox swam out to her one day and found one of the boats uninjured. He afterwards made several trips back and forth, bringing cooking utensils from the galley and many boxes of canned goods from the pantry, with knives, and forks, and spoons, and dishes, and other things that came in very handy for us. If the vessel had held together longer he would have recovered much more from her."

"I suppose you are the cook?" laughed Val.

"Yes, and father says I am a good one. Mamma taught me how to cook and keep house, but this is the only chance I've had to show my skill since we broke up our home after mamma's death."

"I'm afraid you don't have much of anything, except fish, to try your hand on here," said Val.

"Mr. Fox shot a couple of rabbits this morning with his revolver, and I intended to stew one of them for dinner. As we have company, I'm afraid both of them will hardly be enough to go around."

"Are there rabbits on this island?"

"Lots of them. They must have been left here in the past by the crew of some ship."

"Why, we've been looking for something large enough to shoot, and not the ghost of a fourfooted animal have we spied," cried Tom.

"You didn't look in the right place for them," laughed the girl.

"They must have seen us coming and laid low till we got by," said Val.

"Well, it's time I began preparations for dinner, I guess," remarked Ruby. "You can help me if you wish."

"All right. Our services are at your command, Miss Ruby," said Val.

"What shall we do first?" asked Tom.

"Do you think you could skin the rabbits?" she asked.

"Don't know," replied Tom. "Never tried it."

"Tom never did anything in the culinary line in his life," laughed Val. "His folks have three servants, including the cook."

"I'm willing to learn," said Tom.

Ruby got a couple of knives, and taking the boys where the rabbits were hung to the limb of a tree, she took one down and showed the boys how to take the furry jacket off the animal.

They each grabbed a knife and proceeded to imitate her instructions.

While they were thus engaged she started a fire in a hole in the ground which the mate had prepared for the purpose, and then got the pot to stew the rabbits in after they had been cleaned and cut up.

Ruby, with the assistance of her two helpers, turned out a first-class meal.

Besides the stewed rabbits, there were rich yams, bread-fruit and bananas, with canned tongue and two kinds of canned vegetables.

The liquids consisted of cool water and cocoanut milk.

At the conclusion of this banquet, as the boys called it, Captain Foster produced a bottle of prime whiskey and treated Professor Scotchley and Jack Junk.

This part of the programme suited the sailor so well that he helped himself to several extra nips on the sly, and finally walked off with the bottle while the captain was talking with the professor, and betaking himself to the concealment of the tropical vegetation, proceeded to get gloriously full all by himself.

Mr. Fox did not turn up during the meal, and so Ruby set his dinner aside for him.

"Now," said Val, after he and Tom had helped wash the dishes, "suppose we make those torches and explore the inner cave?"

"That suits me," replied Tom.

"You'll come with us, won't you, Miss Ruby?"

She said she would, and so the boys hunted around for suitable material to make the torches out of.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT VAL FOUND IN THE SEA CHEST.

When everything was ready for the exploration of the inner cave, the boys lighted the torches and the three walked to the opening at the end of the outer cave.

Val went in advance, followed by Ruby, while Tom brought up at the end of the procession.

Vance held his torch above his head to light the way and avoid tumbling into any pitfall that might be in his path.

The second cave proved to be only a small one, with a perfectly solid floor.

There was an opening at the further end of it, and when Val entered it he found himself in a narrow winding passage with no roof that he could see.

"I wonder where this will take us to?" he remarked over his shoulder to Ruby.

The girl hadn't the least idea.

The passage was not a long one, and ended in another cave.

Here they found plenty of evidence that the cavern had once been occupied.

There were three sea chests of an old-fashioned kind standing against the walls.

In the center of the place was a long, rude table surrounded by half a dozen kegs which had evidently been used as seats.

They proved on examination to be empty.

There were a number of metal goblets on the table that Tom declared looked to be made of silver.

In one corner were several old cutlasses and a single-barreled pistol with an ornamented wooden stock.

"Hello, here's a silver coin," said Tom, picking the piece of money up.

It proved to be a Spanish piece about the size and weight of an American silver dollar.

"By George!" cried Val, in some excitement. "Looks as if we had struck the old pirate's headquarters."

"That's what it does," replied Tom. "Maybe we'll find a clue to the treasure here."

A closer examination of the cups showed they were not silver, but some base metal that looked like it.

The chests contained a few pieces of faded clothing, but nothing of the least value.

Val turned one of them over to look at the metal knobs that studded it.

He happened to press one of the brass protuberances pretty hard and instantly a shallow drawer flew out half way.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "this chest has a false bottom!"

Looking into the drawer he saw a folded sheet of thick vellum.

Pulling it out, he unfolded it and examined it by the torchlight.

It was covered with writing, all of it in Spanish, which Val couldn't decipher.

Tom and Ruby looked over Val's shoulder as he scanned the characters on the vellum.

"What do you suppose it's all about?" asked Tom.

"How should I know? It's a foreign lingo to me. I can't understand a single word of it. It's just like so much Greek."

"Professor Scotchley will translate it. It looks like Spanish to me. He can read half a dozen languages."

"It might have some reference to the location of the hidden treasure," said Val. "It must be of importance to be concealed in a secret drawer."

"Wouldn't it be great if it was?"

"It would be fine."

"That would let Jack Junk out of it. You found the paper, and if it should show where the treasure is you would be entitled to the biggest part of it."

"What do you take me for—a hog?" protested Val. "We'd divide up even."

"Nonsense! Only us three and the professor would be entitled to a share of it. If I had anything to say you'd have half, because you discovered the document."

"What's the use of talking, or counting our chickens before they're hatched? It may refer to something entirely foreign to the pirate gold."

"I move we return to the front cave and get Professor Scotchley to read it right away," said Tom.

"Oh, there's no rush. The treasure won't run away if this paper has anything to do with it. Let's examine the other chests and see if there are any more secret drawers."

They did so, but the other two chests did not seem to have false bottoms.

They looked the cave over thoroughly, but there was nothing else of interest, so they returned by the way they came.

Mr. Fox had showed up and was eating his meal by himself.

The captain had given him a laying-out, and he was in a sulky humor.

He took no notice of Ruby or the boys, and presently got up, lit his pipe and walked away down to the shore.

Tom called the professor outside and showed him the paper.

"Can you read that, Professor Scotchley?" he asked, while Val and Ruby gathered around in eager anticipation.

The professor looked at the writing.

"Easily," he replied. "It is Spanish. Where did you find it?"

"Val discovered it in a secret compartment of an old chest we found in one of the inner caves."

They waited impatiently for him to run over it.

"What is it about?" asked Tom, at length.

"It seems to be directions how to find a secret cavern."

"Does it say anything about a treasure?"

"Not a word about such a thing. I will translate it for you," said Professor Scotchley.

Whereupon he read the paper off as follows:

"Cavern in base of extinct crater, northwest corner of island. Entrance sealed by revolving block of stone working on a pivot. Impossible to distinguish from face of rock. Find button in center of circle facing entrance. Press and stone will revolve on its axis, showing cavern beyond."

That was all, but it was enough to excite the attention of the boys and Ruby as well.

To their minds it could mean but one thing—a cavern so artfully concealed must be the resting place of the pirate's treasure.

It would not have been so carefully constructed except for a powerful reason, and that reason could only be to hide the treasure acquired by Vasco and his lawless associates, through pillage and murder.

"Write that all out in English, will you, Professor Scotchley?" asked Tom, eagerly.

The professor smiled and did so, using a lead pencil and the reverse side of the vellum.

"That must be a strange cavern," he said. "I hardly wonder that you are interested in it. If you will get the bearings of this particular crater, from Mr. Junk or Captain Foster, we will go over there and examine it."

"I'll see the captain at once about it," said Val, putting the paper in his pocket.

He rushed into the cave for that purpose, but to his disappointment found Captain Foster asleep, and he did not think he ought to disturb him, so he returned outside and told the others that the matter would have to be postponed.

"Postpone nothing," replied Tom, who was hot on the treasure trail, "where's Jack Junk?"

Professor Scotchley said that Jack Junk had left the cave soon after dinner, and he had not seen him since.

"I'll bet he's looking around after that treasure himself," said Tom, in some disgust.

"What is this treasure you're speaking about?" asked the professor.

"Tell him, Val," said Tom.

Accordingly Val told Professor Scotchley all they had learned from Junk about the ill-gotten plunder of the pirate, Vasco the Terrible, who haunted these seas about eighty years or so before.

The professor was very much interested in the subject.

He agreed with the young people that in the light of the buccaneer's notorious career, the expeditions that had been made to the island in search of the supposed treasure, and lastly the document which Val had found referring to a carefully concealed cavern on the island, there was some reason to believe that the clue given in Spanish on the vellum, and for so many years hidden in the false bottom of the chest, might refer to the place where the treasure in question was situated.

"That's exactly our opinion, Professor Scotchley," said Tom. "I'll bet nine dollars to a doughnut that if we can find that cavern we'll find the gold and other things hidden in it."

Ruby clapped her hands at the prospect of finding the treasure.

She had read many stories about hidden pirate treasure, and the idea that she might be connected with the finding of one delighted her immensely.

"I suggest that we start to look for that cavern right away," went on Tom.

"We must get the bearings first," said Val.

"We can get our own bearings."

"How?"

"This is the northern end of the island, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, west is over there. You can see the sun is setting in that direction."

"That's right."

"Now I'm facing north, and my left arm is pointing west. Half way between is northwest. There are two smokeless craters over there. The cavern should be in the base of one of them."

"That's all right; but if the entrance is impossible to distinguish from the face of the rock, we'll have a nice time locating it."

"We don't have to try and locate the entrance, it's the circle with the button in the center of it we must look for. That faces the entrance according to the paper. Find the circle, press the button and the mechanism will do the rest."

"If that circle was put there seventy or eighty years ago it may be all washed away by this time. Think how it rained yesterday afternoon, and such rains are of frequent occurrence in this latitude. Say it rains thirty times a year. Multiply thirty by eighty. What effect would 250 such rains as that have on any mark on the ground? The markings would likely be washed out long ago," said Val.

"Not if they were put there to stay. The circle was

probably not marked with a brush, but chipped out of the solid rock. It would take the rain of several centuries to wear the rock down smooth so that the circle would be obliterated. Don't you think so, Professor Scotchley?" asked Tom.

"That would depend on how deep the circle was indented in the rock," replied the professor.

"Well, as we've got nothing else to do, I vote we all go over to those craters and take a look for the circle. We'll have time enough before dark to tackle one of them, and if we find nothing in the way of a circle we can transfer our investigations to the other to-morrow," said Tom.

"I'm ready to go," said Val. "Are you with us, Miss Ruby?"

"Of course I am," she replied, taking him by the arm.

Tom and the professor went in advance, while Val and Ruby followed, and in this order they shortly arrived at the base of one of the craters.

CHAPTER IX.

SEARCHING FOR THE SECRET CAVERN.

"I suppose we must start from this point and walk around this crater, examining the ground close to it as we go," said Val.

"That's the idea," replied Tom.

"Then all I've got to say is that we've got a pretty good contract on our hands. The ground is all broken up yonder. I doubt very much if we'll be able to get around."

"It's a wonder the chap who wrote that direction on the paper didn't state on which side of the crater the circle was to be found. That would have saved us a lot of trouble."

"He didn't write it for our benefit, Tom," laughed Val. "Apparently he didn't care to make the matter too clear."

"What was the use of writing the direction down, anyway, if he left the most important particular out?"

"I'm not good at guessing conundrums. Give me something easier."

"Well, there's nothing gained by standing here and wasting time jawing. Let us get down to business. I'm going to see if I can circle this crater," and Tom started off to make good his words.

The professor followed, and Val and Ruby brought up the rear as before.

When they came to the broken ground progress became difficult.

Finally their way was blocked by a series of gullies and chasms that were quite impassable.

"We can't go any further in this direction," said Tom. "We must return. There is nothing doing in the circle line any way in this direction."

So they went back to the starting point and started around in the opposite direction.

After going a short distance they met with difficulties again.

There were rocks to get around or climb, and all sorts of obstructions that made an investigation tedious and rather discouraging.

Then they came to a ravine through which a rapid stream ran down to the sea.

"I don't believe there's any secret cavern in this crater," said Tom.

"It might be on the other side of the ravine," replied Val.

"We can't get to the other side, from the looks of things."

"Not from this point, but by going down to the beach and wading the stream we could climb up on the other side—the one facing the ocean. I should think that would be just the spot where the pirates would put their stuff, provided there is a cavern there. It was nearer to their vessel, or to boats from their vessel," said Val. "You and I could go and investigate while Professor Scotchley and Miss Ruby remain here till we get back."

"Well, come on," said Tom.

"Why can't I go, too?" pouted Ruby. "I don't mind climbing over the rocks."

"I think you'd better stay here with the professor," answered Val.

Tom thought so, also.

The fact was, the boys didn't want to be bothered looking after the girl, and helping her over the hard places.

The sun was going down fast, and they didn't have any too much time to finish the job of getting around that particular crater.

So they started off together and found trouble enough in getting down to the shore.

They took off their shoes and waded the stream and then climbed up the ocean side of the crater.

They had all their trouble for nothing, for the general character of the crater showed no indications of a cavern in this quarter.

When the boys got back to the professor and Ruby it was high time for them to return to the north shore and the cave where Captain Foster was.

They hadn't more than reached the place when darkness fell with its customary suddenness in that latitude.

Ruby cooked a pot of coffee over the fire that Val made for her, and this, with crackers and fruit, formed their evening repast.

Jack Junk wasn't present, and the boys wondered where he had gone.

"It's a wonder he wouldn't turn up for his supper," said Val.

"That's his funeral, not ours," replied Tom.

When it came time to turn in the boys found a soft and retired spot in the tropical underbrush near the cave and were soon asleep.

The missing sailor wasn't very far from them, sleeping off his jag.

He turned up in time for breakfast next morning, looking rather seedy.

"Where have you been keeping yourself, Jack?" asked Val.

"Takin' a long snooze, my hearty," replied the sailor, and that was all the explanation they could get out of him.

"He looks as if he had been on a bust," chuckled Val to Tom.

"He does that, but the few drinks Captain Foster treated him to wouldn't have that effect on him," replied Tom.

"He may have found one of those tropical trees the sap of which makes an intoxicating drink."

"He must have struck something that gave him a jag, for he doesn't seem to be thoroughly sober now."

"Maybe he got away with a bottle of the captain's whiskey on the quiet."

"I guess you've hit it. He probably noticed where Ruby got the bottle her father treated with, and he went there and found another."

"Or sneaked with the bottle the captain used."

Immediately after breakfast Tom proposed to resume their search for the secret cavern.

Val and the professor were ready to join him, but Ruby couldn't leave her father, so they started without her.

They hadn't got very far before Jack Junk joined them, and though the boys weren't particularly delighted to have him along they couldn't shake him.

They made straight for the second of the two craters in the northwestern end of the island.

"Are ye huntin' for that there treasure, my hearties?" asked Jack, suspiciously.

"That's what we're doing," replied Val. "I've got a clue to it."

"Ye have, eh? Where did ye get it?"

"Oh, I got it where you never would have found it."

"Do ye mean to say ye have an idee where it's to be found?"

"That's about the size of it; but it doesn't follow that we'll find it, just the same. It's in a sealed-up cavern."

"How do ye know it is?"

"I found that out."

"How did ye find it out?" persisted Junk.

"What difference does that make to you, Jack, as long as you get some of the stuff if we come across it?"

"Some of the stuff! I'm entitled to half of it."

"I don't see that you're entitled to any of it, as you haven't done anything to help find it."

"I told ye that the treasure was here, didn't I?"

"Yes; but that amounts to nothing unless it can be found."

"I told ye that it was in the north end of the island, didn't I?"

"Well, you were wrong. It isn't in the north end."

"What end is it in, then?"

"The northwest end."

"That's all the same."

"Not by a long chalk. But, even admitting that it is, you don't know the first thing about finding the cavern where it's hidden. You hunted for weeks for it when you were here before, and what good did it do you? There is only one way to reach that treasure and Tom, I and the professor know that way."

"So ye've told the professor, have ye?"

"We had to take him into our confidence."

"Why did ye?"

"Because the clue is in Spanish, and he's the only one who could read it."

"What is this here clue ye are talkin' about?" Jack asked curiously.

"It's a paper I found."

"Where did ye find it?"

"In an old sea chest that belonged to one of the pirates."

"Where did ye find the chest?"

"In one of the caverns back of the cave occupied by Captain Foster."

"I seen them chests ten year ago when I was here, but

there wasn't nothin' in 'em. I kin swear to that," replied the sailor, positively.

"Did you examine them?"

"Sure, I did."

"You didn't examine them carefully enough. One of them is fitted with a false bottom. There's a shallow drawer in it. The paper was in that drawer."

"Where is that there paper?"

"Can you read Spanish?"

"Sure, I kin read it."

Val took the sheet of vellum out of his pocket and held it up for the sailor to look at.

"Read it, then."

Jack Junk tried to, but could only make out a few words. Many of the words were faded, and it was so badly written, that it was a poser for the sailor.

Professor Scotchley, being an expert linguist, and well educated in all kinds of handwriting, had experienced no trouble in desciphering the paper.

"Can you understand it?" asked Val.

Jack Junk had to admit reluctantly that he couldn't read it.

"Well, the professor read it without any trouble."

"What does it say?" asked the sailor, eagerly.

"It says nothing about the treasure at all, but it mentions a sealed cavern in one of those two craters we're approaching, and how to get into it. I've got a notion that if we can find that cavern we'll find the treasure there."

"How much do I get if ye do find the stuff?" asked Junk, willing to arbitrate the matter now.

"You'll get some of it, and if there's much there you'll have more money than you ever owned in your life before."

"I want enough to have a good time on till I turn up my toes, d'ye understand?"

"You'll get that much, all right, if you don't spend your share all at once."

"Don't ye worry about me spendin' it all at once," growled the sailor.

"The best thing you can do is not to think about it till you get it. We are not sure of finding the cave."

"Don't the paper say where it is?"

"Only in a general way. It is simply a clue. We've got to hunt for it."

"I'll help ye hunt."

"You can do that when we reach the crater."

It was a brilliant morning, the heat of the sun being tempered by a cool breeze from the sea.

There was little or no surf now around the shore, the ocean having subsided after the gale into a level and glistening expanse of water.

The party caught frequent glimpses of it as they walked along.

At last they reached the crater they were aiming for, and without delay started in to look for the circle mentioned in the sheet of vellum.

CHAPTER X.

DISCOVERY OF THE SECRET CAVERN.

They first directed their course toward the sea, looking carefully along the ground which, however, was thickly covered with vegetation.

After going a hundred yards without result their further progress was barred by a precipitous break in the ground.

Here the crater, as far as they could see around it, descended in a sheer perpendicular wall into the ocean.

"Stuck again!" said Tom, rather disgusted with the outlook. "If we don't hit the circle in the other direction I'll begin to think that paper don't amount to a whole lot after all."

They reversed their course.

"I'm afraid that the circle is covered up by the vegetation which has likely overgrown it in the eighty years since it was made," said Val.

"That's a very reasonable supposition," said Professor Scotchley.

"We'll have to clear the vegetation away, then," said Tom.

"How long do you suppose it would take us to cut the stuff down? Months. Besides, the circle, if made at all, must have been made on a slab of rock, and I don't see how anything could grow on a rock."

"It could grow all around the rock and hide it, couldn't it?" said Tom.

"It could do that easily enough in time, if the rock wasn't too big."

"The rains could wash enough earth over the slab to hide it, and form a bed for vegetation to grow in," said Professor Scotchley. "All that could happen inside of eighty years."

"I guess we're up against a hard proposition," said Tom, as they walked slowly along, looking in front and to the right and left as they proceeded.

"Hard or not, we'll stick it out as long as circumstances permit us to. The object to be gained is well worth any amount of exertion," said Val.

They were now ascending to a higher plane up the side of the crater, and they gradually obtained a more extended view of the island.

A quarter of a mile away, jutting out into the ocean, was the first of the three smoking craters.

The second was at a right angle on the other shore of the island, while the third was about a mile away, at the south end.

"Where are we going?" asked Tom at length, pausing to fan himself with his hat. "Up to the top of this cone?"

"Looks like it," replied Val.

"Then we're on the wrong track. The paper said the cavern was at the base of the crater, and the base of anything is usually the bottom, or the spot on which it stands."

"The base in this case may mean the foot of the wall at any particular spot."

"It may mean a whole lot, but I don't believe it does, just the same."

"We'll keep on, anyway, and see where we come out at."

"Oh, all right," replied Tom. "I don't care; but I've money to bet that we don't—"

Val suddenly made a dart forward several paces and then looked down at the ground.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, excitedly. "Here's the circle."

His ejaculation brought the rest of the party up in short order.

They all gathered about him and looked down where he pointed.

Sure enough, there was an immense circle, divided into ten segments, cut in a slab of solid stone.

The circle and the lines of the segments were filled up with dirt and covered with vegetation.

A circular spot in the center was also covered with green turf.

Anybody not looking for a circle would hardly suspect that the circle was anything more than an odd arrangement of Nature, which often does curious things.

Val knelt down close to the center piece and began pulling the growth away.

This accomplished, he scooped the earth out of the hole into which it had taken lodgment.

He was looking for the button which, according to the paper, controlled the mechanism that opened and closed the entrance to the cavern in the crater.

At length he had removed the last of the earth.

There lay a small protuberance in the very center of the hole.

The boy placed his thumb upon it and, with beating heart, bore down on it.

As Val pressed the knob in the basin-like hole a remarkable change took place in the apparently solid surface of the rock.

A ponderous stone, working on an axis, swung downward into a horizontal position, revealing a room beyond.

All hands gazed on the opening with wonder and astonishment, then Professor Scotchley broke the charm by an exhibition of boyish delight.

He uttered a shout and a hop and swung his hat in the air.

Tom threw one arm up and gave a loud hurrah.

Jack Junk, who was in the rear, gazed in bewildered astonishment.

Val, being down on his hands and knees, had a better view of the interior than the others.

He saw some boxes piled near the entrance, several of them actually overflowing with what appeared to be gold coin.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, gleefully, springing to his feet. "There's the treasure. -I can see money to burn! We'll all be millionaires!"

He made a dash to enter the cavern, closely followed by Tom.

In a moment both had passed under the poised slab and were gazing spellbound at the heaps of coin on the tops of the boxes.

Professor Scotchley and Jack Junk followed them, and the eyes of the latter took on an avaricious gleam as his gaze rested on the heaps of money.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Tom. "These boxes are fairly overflowing with yellow boys. It makes my mouth water to look at them."

Val thrust his hand into one of the money piles and took up a fistful.

The coins were all about the size of an American quarter and uncommonly bright.

Professor Scotchley leaned forward and took several of the coins out of Val's hands.

A curious smile wreathed his countenance as he examined and weighted them.

"This is not gold," he said. "It's brass."

"Brass!" gasped Val and Tom in a breath.

"Exactly—brass. And they're not regular coins, either. They are private tokens of an old South American diamond mining firm, once used for barter and exchange among the employees only. I've seen samples of these coins before. In fact, I have several in my coin collection at home. They are practically worthless now, and are no longer used for the purpose for which they were cast."

A closer look at the money convinced the two boys that Professor Scotchley had only spoken the truth, and their expectations of having become millionaires sank down to zero, while Jack Junk gazed at the bright money in stupid bewilderment.

"And these iron-bound boxes are all full of the dern stuff," said Tom in great disgust.

He dug his hand down into one pile of coin, but it met with a hard obstruction.

Sweeping the brass stuff away he found he had struck the top of the box.

"These coins are only piled on the outside of this box," he said.

The boys found the same fact true with respect to the other two boxes.

The coins were merely heaped on top of them to give them the appearance of being full to overflowing.

"That's what I call a low-down, deceptive trick," said Tom, wrathfully. "Do you suppose those pirates did that to fool anybody who found this cavern by accident?"

"Give it up," replied Val, gloomily, for all his golden visions had been ruthlessly shattered.

"How do you suppose those pirates got hold of this brass rot?" asked Tom of Professor Scotchley.

"The coin was probably manufactured in Europe for the diamond company, and the pirates no doubt captured the vessel that was bringing it to Rio de Janeiro, which was the headquarters of the diamond mining company about that time. That is the only reasonable way I can see that they could have got possession of so much of it."

"Do you suppose all these kegs and boxes are full of the blamed stuff?"

Val lifted one of the boxes.

"It's pretty heavy," he said. "And doesn't look as if it had ever been opened. All the boxes are of one size and are certainly filled with something, but I feel sure that it isn't the treasure we're after."

Tom was certain of that fact, too.

He laid hold of one of the kegs and found it weighty also.

"Maybe they're full of gunpowder," he said.

"Or some kind of liquor," suggested Val giving one of them a kick.

At the mention of the word "liquor" Jack Junk smacked his lips in a greedy way, for next to a keg of gold, a keg full of whiskey or brandy struck a long-felt want in his breast.

"If the pirates had any treasure it must be here somewhere," said Tom. "Let's look around."

Val at that moment spied a heavy brass-bound sea-chest in a corner.

"What's this?" he said, going over to it.

He tried to lift it, but it was as solid as a rock.

"Maybe some of the pirate treasure is in this," he said.

"It's heavy enough to be filled with gold."

The four gathered around the chest and looked at it critically.

Suddenly Val stooped down and picked up three Spanish doubloons that lay alongside of the chest.

They were silver pieces as big as an American dollar.

The discovery of the doubloons raised the hopes of the boys once more.

Tom lit a match, looked behind the chest and found two more of the same kind of coin.

"I'll bet this is one of the treasure chests," he said, with fresh excitement. "Look, how strongly clamped the thing is! Why, it would take a sledge-hammer to burst it open!"

The general opinion of all hands was that the chest contained something of value, and the boys were eager to get it open.

That, however, was an impossibility without tools.

Tom suggested tackling it with heavy stones, but Val objected to that method as being impracticable.

"There is a hatchet and some carpenter's tools at the cave," he said. "We'd better return there now, and this afternoon we'll come back here with the implements most available for the purpose and go through this chest, and also investigate the contents of the boxes and kegs. It's the most sensible course we can pursue, don't you think so, Professor Scotchley?"

The professor agreed with him.

Tom also thought it was a good plan, and said so.

While the boys were talking Jack Junk was casting an avaricious eye on the supposed treasure chest, and mentally calculating how much of its contents ought to come to him.

The attitude of the boys didn't please him a little bit.

As matters looked to him they apparently intended to claim the lion's share of whatever treasure was found, and hand him over what they thought fit, which he judged would be a very small part.

He was of the opinion that he ought to have half of the pirate's plunder.

The boys never would have thought about Vasco's treasure but for him.

To be cut off with a small share wasn't a square deal in his opinion.

The sight of the heavy iron-bound sea-chest, which he felt assured contained the treasure he had been thinking about off and on for a matter of thirty years, excited a strong feeling of cupidity in his breast, and an equally strong feeling of resentment against any one who would try to deprive him of what he considered rightfully his property.

The longer he considered the matter the uglier he grew on the subject, until some pretty bad thoughts began to take possession of his brain.

"Come on, let's get back," said Val at length, walking out of the cavern.

The rest of the party followed, the sailor reluctantly.

"Now to close the entrance," said Val, going to the hole in the center of the circle where the knob was. "I wonder how the reverse action works?"

As the party gathered around him Jack Junk watched the boy's movements with sharp attention, as he wanted to learn how to operate the mechanism himself.

"I pressed down on it before, which caused the stone

to revolve," said Val. "I suppose I ought to pull on it now to make it turn back into its place again."

He suited the action to the word.

All heard the sharp click that followed somewhere about the entrance.

Then the ponderous stone revolved backward and sealed up the opening without making a sound, so nicely adjusted it was.

"The man who executed that job was an artist," said Val. "I don't see how such a contrivance could have been built away out here on an island in the middle of the South Pacific."

"The fact speaks for itself," replied Tom, "and there's no cause for us to worry about how it was done. There were expert mechanics eighty years ago as well as to-day. Press the button and let's see if it works all right again."

Val pressed the knob, and the stone opened as noiselessly and easily as before.

Then he closed it again.

"It is probably worked by a series of thin steel arms under the slab," said Professor Scotchley, who was much interested in the mechanical contrivance.

"I don't see why the pirates went to all this trouble when they could have buried the stuff somewhere down along the seashore and it would have been just as safe," said Val.

"I should imagine that one of their number, being of a mechanical turn of mind, suggested this scheme as an improvement on the customary burying process," replied the professor. "Its very novelty no doubt caught the fancy of his comrades and they acted on it under his directions. At any rate, the fact remains that the idea was carried out, and in the most clever manner. After the knob in the hole was covered up with earth, no one not in the secret of its existence would ever discover it except by accident. Just why the big circle was cut into segments, however, is not very clear to me, for it looks like a useless proceeding."

After some further talk on the subject the party started back for the cave by the sea, full of golden visions of the future.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED IN THE CAVERN.

The boys found Ruby impatiently awaiting their return.

"Well," she asked, expectantly, "did you make any discovery?"

"We did," replied Val. "We found the circle and the secret cave."

"Did you, really?"

"Ask Tom."

"That's right; we found it," said Tom.

"What about the pirate's treasure?"

"That's a conundrum at present," he replied.

"Didn't you find anything in the cavern?" she asked, in surprise.

"Oh, yes. We found a lot of boxes and kegs, and a heavy iron-clamped sea-chest. If the treasure is there it is in that chest, most likely."

"Didn't you examine the chest?"

"No. It had too solid a look for us to get a peep inside. We're going back after dinner with the hatchet, and any

other suitable tools we can find, and open it somehow so as to find out just what it contains."

"I'm going with you," she said, in a tone which indicated that she didn't mean to be left out in the cold.

"All right. I'll see that you don't get into trouble," laughed Val.

"You're very kind," she replied, making him a mock courtesy.

Val then told her about how they had been deceived by piles of brass private money, which they had first taken for gold coin.

She laughed heartily over the matter, and said she hoped the next money they found would be the real thing.

"Val, let's go and take a bath in the inlet before dinner," said Tom.

"I'm with you," replied Val. "What's your bill-of-fare to-day, Miss Ruby?"

"Potted meat, canned tongue, breadfruit, canned corn, bananas, yams, and cocoanut milk."

"That's a fine lay-out for the shipwrecked and marooned inhabitants of this island. Almost as good as hotel fare," said Tom. "I am beginning to feel hungry already."

"We'll have fried fish for supper if somebody would be kind enough to catch a few," said the girl.

"Got any fishing tackle?" asked Val.

"Oh, yes. You boys might look for some shellfish while you're in bathing. You'll find lots among the outer rocks of the reef."

"I suppose we must make ourselves useful in order to earn our grub," said Val.

"You won't have to do it long, for I suppose your vessel will be back by to-morrow," she replied.

"I wish she wouldn't turn up for a week or two," said Tom. "I'm just beginning to enjoy myself here."

"Well, run along and take your bath. I shall expect you back to dinner inside of an hour."

The boys walked over to a cove a quarter of a mile away, undressed and plunged into the waters of the inlet.

The inlet was a narrow arm of the ocean protected by a long line of reef.

"I'll race you over to the reef, Tom," said Val.

"What's the stake?"

"Oh, I'll go you anything from a nickel to half a dollar."

"Make it a quarter. I don't want to rob you of all your change," grinned Tom.

"A quarter it is. Are you ready?"

"Sure."

"One, two, three—go!"

The race began at once, and Val won by a length.

"You're an easy proposition," laughed Val, as he climbed on the outer line of rocks.

"You didn't beat me so much that you need crow over it," growled Tom.

"It's like finding money to swim you for a wager. Aren't you sorry you bet?"

"No, I ain't sorry, smart aleck. I'll bet you another quarter I'll beat you back to the beach."

"You're a dead game sport, aren't you?" chuckled Val. "Come, now, you want to get busy and look for some shellfish. We'll carry them back in this net I fetched along."

They had no difficulty in finding all the shellfish they wanted, and with a net full they swam leisurely back,

dressed, and returned to the cave, where they found dinner waiting for them.

After the meal Val announced that they would return to the crater.

"Will you carry the hatchet, Jack?" he asked the sailor.

"No. I'm not goin' over ag'in to-day, my hearty," growled Junk, throwing himself down under the shade of a species of palm tree.

The boys were surprised at Jack's apparent want of interest in the treasure, but were just as well pleased to leave him behind.

They wouldn't have been quite so satisfied if they knew what was passing in the sailor's mind.

Captain Foster asked Tom to lend his rifle to Mr. Fox to go rabbit hunting with while they were away, and the boy consented.

The party proceeded in much the same order as during the preceding afternoon, Ruby showing a decided preference for Val's society.

In due time they reached the crater and ascended to the place where the circle was.

They had not the least idea that their footsteps were dogged by Jack Junk, who had followed them far enough behind to escape observation.

Ruby uttered an exclamation of astonishment when Val pushed the knob in the hole and the heavy slab swung out on its axis, disclosing the cavern with its barrels and boxes beyond.

As they all disappeared inside of the opening, Jack Junk slouched cautiously up the incline.

A wicked plan had taken possession of his brain.

If it worked all right he figured that the whole of the pirates' treasure, which he believed to be in the sea-chest, would be his.

How he could carry that treasure away from the island after he got possession of it in the manner he was calculating on did not bother him just then.

While he was slowly making his way toward the mouth of the cavern Val and Tom were figuring whether they should commence operations on the sea-chest or on one of the boxes.

Finally they decided to begin with one of the boxes, and Val, with the hatchet and a large-sized chisel, started to pry the cover off.

"Suppose we all take a guess as to what the box contains before the cover comes off?" said Tom with a grin.

"I'll bet it doesn't contain any of the pirates' treasure," said Val.

"I'll wager it's full of those brass tokens," said Tom.

"I couldn't guess, for I haven't the least idea what's in it," said Ruby.

"What do you think is in that box, Professor Scotchley?" asked Tom.

"I think it's a case of spirits," he answered.

"What makes you think so?"

"That trade-mark burned in the wood. All the boxes have it."

After some difficulty Val succeeded in removing the cover.

The professor's guess was the correct one.

The box contained a dozen sealed stone jugs labeled "Schiedam Schnapps."

"That settles the contents of these boxes," said Val. "They all hold gin."

"How about the kegs?" said Tom.

"I'd like to bet a dollar to a nickel that they contain some kind of spirits, too."

"What do you suppose the pirates brought all that stuff here for?"

"To drink, of course. They always liked to have a howling old time when they were ashore, so they laid in a good stock of the stuff which they must have captured on some vessel which probably carried a cargo of it. These boxes and barrels contain what they didn't get the chance to consume. It was left for a future carouse which never came off, because the rascals never returned to the island."

"Well, let's tackle the chest, and see if the treasure is in that. It must be somewhere about, if the villains didn't take it away with them."

"If it isn't in this chest then it may be concealed in an inner cavern. There's a hole in the wall yonder which leads somewhere."

All looked in the direction that Val pointed and saw a dark aperture which indicated the way to a passage or cave beyond.

"The reason why I feel almost sure the treasure Jack spoke about must be here is that the pirates would hardly go to the trouble of sealing this cavern up in such an artful manner if they didn't have some powerful reason for doing it," said Val. "If their plunder isn't in this sea-chest it's hidden in another cavern back of this, reached through that opening in the wall."

"Well, see if you can knock the cover off the chest," said Tom.

"What's the matter with you taking the first whack? I opened the case of gin."

"All right. Give me the chisel and hatchet."

"Where are you going to start in?" asked Val.

"Here," said Tom, giving the cover a smart upward crack with the hammer end of the hatchet.

To the astonishment of the boys the lid bounced up several inches and fell back again.

"Why, it isn't locked at all," said Val, seizing the lid and flinging it open.

As Val lit a match all gathered around the sea-chest full of curiosity and anticipation as to the character of its contents.

To their great disappointment it proved to contain nothing more valuable than several coils of rope and a number of heavy tackle blocks, together with a lot of other nautical gear of a similar kind.

"Well, if that wouldn't jar you!" cried Tom. "And we thought it was full of gold money and valuable jewels, and other things of that kind."

"Isn't it too disappointing for anything?" said Ruby.

Professor Scotchley, who since the discovery of the brass tokens had begun to entertain very serious doubts as to the presence of any treasure at all in the cavern, stroked his beard and looked wise, like an old owl.

"If Jack was here he'd have a fit over this throw-down," said Val.

The words had hardly left his mouth before the attention of the party was attracted by a sharp click at the opening.

They turned just in time to see the huge stone revolve, shutting them prisoners in the cavern.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WAY TO FREEDOM BLOCKED.

A moment before the afternoon sun, streaming through the opening, had lighted the cavern fairly well, now the little party was surrounded by an Egyptian darkness.

The transformation had been so sudden and unexpected that for a moment or two those imprisoned in the place never stirred nor uttered a sound.

Then the spell was broken by Tom exclaiming:

"Great Jewhittaker! The stone got loose somehow and we're caught in here like rats in a box trap. What are we going to do now?"

"The stone didn't get loose of itself," replied Val, coolly.

"It didn't!" ejaculated Tom. "It must have."

"No. Jack Junk has trapped us."

"Jack Junk!" cried Tom, in surprise. "Why, he didn't come with us."

"I know he didn't, but he followed us, just the same. He's up to some game."

"How do you know Jack Junk trapped us? And why should he do so?"

"Because the moment I heard the click I recognized the sound and looked quickly at the entrance. I could see right out under the stone as it commenced to revolve. Jack was lying on the ground across the circle with his face turned toward the opening with a look of triumph on his features."

"Is that so?" gasped Tom.

"Yes, it's so."

"What do you suppose his object is?"

"Probably to frighten us into making terms with him. He wants half of the treasure that he thinks is in those kegs and boxes."

"He can have the whole of what's in them, for all I care. There's enough gin there to keep him blazing drunk for a year," said Tom.

"It is evident to me that the fellow is a rascal at heart," said Val. "We have been deceived in him. The idea of him following us up here and then making us prisoners! I'd like to punch his head."

Val took out his match-safe and struck a light.

"We'll soon use up all our matches if we've got to depend on them for illumination," said Tom, as Val struck a second one. "We ought to have torches."

"What's that yonder on the top of that case?" asked Tom, pointing.

Tom went over and laid hold of the article.

He uttered a cry of satisfaction.

"It's a lantern," he said, "and there's a candle in it."

The candle was lighted and it glowed as brightly as though it had been in steady use right along, and not out of commission for so many years.

Taking the lantern in his hand, Val, with Ruby close behind him, led the way through the dark hole at the end of the cavern.

They found themselves in a narrow, rocky passage that inclined downward.

Val expected that this passage would terminate in another cavern close at hand, but it didn't.

Finally he came to a junction with another passage, leading off to the left.

Here he stopped and waited for Tom and the professor to come up.

"Stuck?" asked Tom, over Ruby's shoulder.

"No," replied Val. "I am simply up against another passage. I don't know whether we had better follow the one we're on or take the other."

"You might try the new one. Go on a little way yourself and see if it runs far. We'll wait here for you to come back. If you hit another passage on your way come right back for fear that you might get muddled up and lose us."

"Let me go with you, Val," begged Ruby.

"You can come, if you want to," he replied, "though I should think you'd rather remain here with Tom and the professor."

"No, I want to go with you," she insisted.

She was allowed to have her way, and when Val started off along the new passage she tagged on close behind him.

After going down a short distance the passage took a decided up-grade.

The floor was comparatively smooth and free of stones or earthy obstacles.

Suddenly it took a sharp turn, and Val saw light ahead.

"There's an opening in front of us, Ruby," said Val, dropping the Miss, as she had called him Val. "This may be a back exit from the cavern."

"I hope it is," replied the girl. "I don't like to be shut up underground."

The ascent grew steeper as they proceeded.

Then they caught a glimpse of the blue sky and a fleck of sunshine.

Val blew out the light in the lantern, for he knew he had to go back through that passage, and he wanted to save the candle.

At length they reached the opening and looked out to see whereabouts they were.

They found they were about forty feet down the inside of the extinct crater.

All around them the wall of rock rose and descended in an inaccessible and precipitous fashion.

Not the slightest chance of escape for them lay in that direction.

"We're stuck, Ruby," he said. "We can't get out this way, that's certain."

"Isn't that just too provoking for anything?" she replied, feeling ready to cry from vexation.

"It's rough, that's a fact. Just take a look down into the crater. Doesn't it give you the creeps to imagine where you would go if you tumbled into this yawning hole?"

Ruby looked and then shuddered, while she grabbed Val's arm the tighter.

"Oh, dear, what shall we do now?" asked Ruby.

"There's nothing for us to do but to go back and rejoin Tom and Professor Scotchley."

They started back the way they came, and as Val knew the road was straight and clear he did not relight the lantern.

When he thought he was drawing close to where Tom and

the professor were awaiting their return he shouted out, "Halloa, Tom!"

"Halloa, old man!" came back from a short distance ahead.

In another minute the party came together again.

"Well, where did the passage lead to?" asked Tom.

"You'd never guess," replied Val.

"I'm not going to try. Where did it lead to? The open air?"

"Yes."

"Can we get out?" asked his friend, eagerly.

"No. The passage ends right in the crater."

"The dickens it does!"

"It does, about forty feet from the top edge. The interior of the crater is nothing but a sheer wall of precipitous rock, up and down. If we had wings we might stand a show of getting out, otherwise, nit."

"That's rough. Shall we go back and see if Jack Junk has opened the entrance?"

"You can, if you like, and we'll await you here. It's my opinion that he hasn't made any effort to release us."

"Then you want to push on down through this passage on the chance that it may bring us out somewhere?"

"To tell you the truth, Tom, I don't really believe there is a back way out."

"Then why go on?"

"I've a curiosity to see where this leads to. It is possible there is another cavern in this crater where the pirates hid their plunder. It certainly isn't in the sealed cavern. If we don't find such an underground vault I think we may conclude that the pirates got away with their treasures themselves. Or else somebody who got hold of the secret of entering the cavern came here and carted the stuff off without any one becoming the wiser."

Tom concluded not to return to the sealed cavern, as he judged they would in the end all have to go back together, so the downward line of march was renewed with Val and Ruby in the lead.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WONDERFUL MARINE CAVERN.

The passage had a clear descending grade, sometimes quite steep in places, but mostly easy to walk along.

It wound along somewhat in a serpentine fashion, and was clear of pitfalls or obstructions of any kind.

Val was very careful not to advance too rapidly, as well as to flash the lantern continually before him.

As Val raised the lantern above his head his hand came into contact with the roof of the passage, which was scarcely more than a foot above their heads at this point, while its width had narrowed to about three feet.

The slope also became much steeper, and they had to walk more carefully.

Suddenly Val stopped short, and held up the lantern beneath which he peered.

"Do you see anything, Val?" asked Ruby, anxiously.

"No, but I hear something."

A dull rushing sound smote upon their ears, but in a muffled, strange way, that puzzled them to make out what it might be.

"Water, isn't it?" spoke up the professor. "The sea breaking in through some hole near here."

"Maybe it is," said Tom; "but it sounds awfully weird to me—just like the deep breathing of some sea monster."

"I'll bet there's a sea cave below us," said Val, after listening intently. "Maybe one of us could get out by swimming. Then he could climb up the shore, return to the spot where the circle is and reopen the entrance for the rest to get out."

"You may be right," said Tom. "Are you going to push ahead and see?"

"I am," returned Val.

He started to advance without his usual caution, and as a consequence met with an unexpected surprise.

He stepped into a shallow hole, lost his balance, pitched forward, and came down on all fours with a crash.

The lantern was smashed and the candle extinguished, leaving the party in complete darkness.

Ruby uttered a scream which echoed and re-echoed through the passage.

"Great Scott! What's happened to you, Val?" asked Tom, aghast.

"I stepped unexpectedly into a hollow about a foot deep. For the moment I thought I was going down into a pit. The worst of it is I've busted the lantern."

"That's bad," answered Tom.

"It can't be helped," said Val, lighting a match and hunting among the debris of the shattered lantern for the remains of the candle.

He found and lit it, then he helped Ruby down into the hollow, and pointing it out to Tom and Professor Scotchley, started on again with due caution.

As they pressed forward the sound of rushing water became more and more apparent, and evidently close at hand.

"We are getting near the level of the ocean," said Val. "If there's a sea cave down here we ought to reach it inside of a minute or two."

As he spoke Val came to a sharp turn in the passage.

Ahead of him he saw a dull, flickering light.

This grew brighter as he advanced, until a peculiar radiance filled the passage.

It came around another turn straight before them.

When Val reached it he saw that the passage terminated in a huge marine cavern.

Not only that, but the floor ended with equal abruptness, leaving a drop of about ten feet between them and a hard inclined sandy beach.

Val gazed in a kind of entranced way at the picture before him, and Ruby, looking over his shoulder, had the same view.

What Val and Ruby saw was a large cavern, floored with beautifully smooth, soft sand, and lit up by the same soft gray dawn that had greeted them at the end of the passage, but how this light entered the place they could not make out, for no opening was visible, and the rushing, roaring sound of the water came from the lofty roof.

"What's stopping you, Val?" asked Tom, from behind.

"I've reached the end of the passage," replied his chum.

"There's a drop of a dozen feet before me right down into the finest sea cave you ever dreamed of."

"You don't say! That's where the light comes from, eh?" said Tom, eagerly.

"I don't know where the light comes from. There isn't any opening to the cave as far as I can see."

"There isn't?" exclaimed Tom, in astonishment. "There must be an opening to let in that light."

"Probably there is, only I can't catch sight of it from here. I'm going to jump down now and then you and Professor Scotchley can get a view of the cave."

Suiting the action to the words, Val sprang down on the sandy floor.

Then he turned around and held out his arms to Ruby.

"Jump, and I'll catch you."

She obeyed without hesitation, but gave a little gasp as he caught her in his arms.

Tom uttered an exclamation of wonder and pleasure as he came to the opening and saw the dimly-lit marine cavern.

"Come on, Tom," said Val, impatiently. "We must examine this place and see if we can get out before the sun sets, otherwise we stand a good show of remaining here all night."

That aroused Tom to a sense of the situation, and he jumped down.

Professor Scotchley followed.

"Hello!" exclaimed Val. "Look at those chests yonder in the shadow of that rocky spur. Maybe they contain the treasure we're looking for."

He rushed up to the spot where four old-fashioned sailor's chests were ranged in order, partially concealed by a projecting wall of rock that prevented them from being seen except when a person stood in a certain position.

Tom followed his chum, and they were looking at the chests when Ruby and Professor Scotchley joined them.

"A dollar to a doughnut this is the pirates' treasure," said Val, in some excitement.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE SEALED CAVERN.

"Those chests were never brought here through that passage," said Tom, sagaciously. "It's too narrow for them to pass through. Consequently, it stands to reason that there is another entrance to this cavern. If we want any further evidence of the fact we have it in the wavy light which illuminates this place. The light must come from somewhere. When we find the source of it I'll bet we'll find a way of getting out into the air once more."

Tom pointed up at the side farthest from him where he stood, and a little closer investigation showed that the pale, soft light appeared to be reflected upward against the roof, coming from behind a screen of rock.

He and Val crossed to this point and found that they could easily pass around the rocky screen, which reached half-way to the ceiling, and they now stood in a tolerably wide passage lit by a soft, flickering green light, which came through a low arch, and on reaching and passing through this the boys uttered a shout of delight, for before them was another cavern, whose low, flattened roof was glorious with a lovely, ever-changing pattern, formed by the reflection of the sunlight on the waves outside.

The inflowing and receding water reached about half-way from the seaward entrance to the cavern, and a line of seaweed which indicated high-water mark.

This showed that the tide was retiring, and figuring on

the slope of the sandy floor the boys saw that the entrance was submerged at high tide.

While they were congratulating each other that the avenue of escape lay before them, they were joined by Ruby and Professor Scotchley.

The sight of the sea and the blue sky in the distance delighted the girl beyond measure.

It was such a pleasant contrast to the darkness that had surrounded them for the past hour.

"Isn't this cave just too lovely for anything?" cried Ruby, clapping her hands in delight. "Look at those anemones and limpets and coral! See those little pools, too, among the rocks! And doesn't the sea look grand from here?"

The boys and Professor Scotchley agreed with her that the scene before them was both novel and interesting, and worthy of being transferred to the canvas of some celebrated marine painter.

"Well, it's getting late," said Val. "If we're going to escape from this place we want to be getting about it."

"How about those chests in the other cave?" asked Tom, whose thoughts were never far from the wished-for treasure.

"They won't run away, and we can't do anything with them now. We know how to get down here from the sealed cavern above. The hatchet and chisel are up there. Tomorrow we'll fetch them down and see what is inside the chests."

"The only way to get out of this place that I can see is by swimming," said Tom. "That wouldn't be so hard for you and me, but for the professor and Miss Foster——"

"Look here, Tom, only one of us need do the swimming act—me for instance. You, Miss Ruby and the professor must make your way in the dark back to the sealed cavern. The way is straight and easy, and you can't go astray. I'll swim out and around to the nearest landing place along shore. Then I'll walk up the crater to the spot where the circle is and let you all out. That will solve all difficulties."

Ruby didn't like the idea of returning through the long passage in the dark, especially without Val, but she had to agree to the arrangement.

So they all returned to the inner cave and the boys assisted Professor Scotchley and Ruby up to the opening of the passage.

Val then boosted Tom up and bade them a temporary good-bye.

Going back to the outer cavern he stripped and rolled his garments into a small bundle.

Holding them well above his head, he waded out through the entrance into the sea until the water reached his neck, then he struck out with one arm.

A short swim brought him to a spot where he obtained a footing on the rocks, and he found he could walk the rest of the way to the beach by using care.

After dressing himself he had a roundabout walk before him to strike the crater beyond the break in its seaward face.

At length he reached the path leading to the circle and hurried forward, wondering if he should find Jack Junk up there.

When he came in sight of the spot where the circle was,

there was no sign of the rascally sailor, and the entrance to the cavern was shut.

"I wonder if the villain intended leaving us in there all night?" Val asked himself. "It must be so, or he would be hanging around here. I don't see how he expected to make his terms known to us through that sealed door. I doubt if the human voice would penetrate it. Maybe he discovered that fact and then decided to leave us in there till to-morrow morning, thinking to scare us into coming to such terms as he means to propose. Well, this is where he got left. He's welcome to all the gin and other spirits in there, as well as the contents of the sea-chest. We'll be satisfied with what we find to-morrow in the four chests down in the marine cave."

Thus speaking, Val pressed the knob in the hole and the stone revolved to its horizontal position, affording free entrance and exit to and from the cavern.

Val expected to find the rest of the party ready to step out, but there was no one in the cavern, so he threw himself on the grass outside and waited patiently for them to appear.

They entered the cavern five minutes later, and Tom gave a shout when he saw the entrance open.

As soon as they were outside, Val closed the doorway and they started for the cave on the north shore.

"It will be dark by the time we get there," said Val. "We'll have a late supper to-night."

"You and I will have to jump on Jack's neck for playing us such a measly trick."

"I'll bet he'll be surprised when he sees us. He'll wonder how we escaped from the place."

"Let him wonder. It will do him good."

"We don't want him with us to-morrow. He mustn't learn what's in those chests down in the marine cavern, for I have a strong idea we shall find treasure in them."

"He'll be sure to follow us if he doesn't come with us."

"Then Professor Scotchley must sit outside the cave and stand watch."

"He couldn't prevent Jack entering the cave and following us down through the passage, as he certainly would do when he saw what we were up to. He'd guess we were hunting for the treasure, and would insist on butting in."

"How are we going to head him off, then?" asked Val.

"You and I must enter the marine cavern by swimming."

"We couldn't do it except at low tide. If the tide rose while we were in there we'd have to remain there some hours in the dark till it receded again."

"That wouldn't hurt us any. We could make some more torches and use them."

"That's right. But I think we ought to build a raft. Then we wouldn't have to swim into the cave. We'll have to do it, anyway, to remove those chests, if they're worth removing."

They continued to canvass the subject till they reached the cave, which they did just at dark.

Jack Junk was sitting under a tree talking to Fox, the mate, and when he saw them he nearly had a fit.

The boys had decided to say nothing to him for the present, and they started in to assist Ruby prepare supper.

After the meal the young people went off by themselves to talk about the treasure they expected to find next day.

It was arranged that Ruby was to ask her father to get the sailor and the mate to go next morning to the cove where the body of Captain Rynders was landed, in order to see if the Golden Gate had got back to the island.

That would get Jack out of the way for a time, at least.

This plan was duly carried out, and Junk and Mr. Fox were persuaded to start immediately after breakfast.

The sailor went rather reluctantly, but he couldn't very well get out of it.

After he was gone the boys rummaged the carpenter's chest that Mr. Fox had brought ashore from the brig and picked out an auger and a center-bit.

They also manufactured four torches, and took enough eatables in a canvas bag for their dinner, as they were not sure of getting back until late in the afternoon.

Ruby and the professor accompanied them to the sealed cavern.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GOLD OF THE SEVEN CRATERS.

On entering the place Ruby was given the hatchet and chisel to carry, and Professor Scotchley was asked to carry a coil of thin rope taken from the sea-chest.

Then they descended to the first of the marine caverns.

The tide was up, and they found it dark as pitch.

Two torches stuck in the sand furnished all the light they needed for the business in hand.

Val began operations on one of the chests with the center-bit, making holes around the lock.

Then he knocked the lock in and threw up the cover of the chest.

The first thing that met their eyes was a Spanish merchant flag filling in the entire top of the chest.

Val yanked this away and found the chest filled with silver plate, goblets and flagons, as well as ornaments and vessels evidently intended for use in a church.

"The treasure at last!" cried Val, as they gazed upon the valuable contents of the chest.

"Isn't there any money-bags at the bottom?" asked Tom.

"I can't tell what is at the bottom till we pull this stuff out," replied Val.

Investigation showed that there was no money or jewels in that chest.

"We'll find the money in one of the other chests, then, if the pirates didn't spend it all," said Tom.

A second chest was opened in a similar manner, and it was found filled with bags of gold and silver.

The third was filled entirely with gold Spanish and French coin, and the fourth held not only money-bags, but a large collection of expensive watches, chains, and valuable jewelry of every imaginable description.

Professor Scotchley made a rough estimate of the value of everything at about a million dollars.

It was decided then and there that Val was entitled to two-fifths of the treasure, and that each of the others should have one-fifth.

Then a council was held to decide on the safest way to get the treasure away from the island without attracting attention to its real character.

The chief difficulty in the way was Jack Junk, who would be sure to make trouble as soon as he saw the chests.

He would suspect their contents at once, and unless he was bought off he would be likely to give everything away.

When they got back to the cave at the north end they expected to hear that the Golden Gate had arrived and was waiting for them, consequently they would have little time to make their final arrangements for leaving the island.

"If we have time I think it would be the best thing to take this treasure out of these chests, since we have destroyed the locks, and nail it up in those boxes in the cavern above after dumping out the gin bottles," said Val.

The others agreed that the boxes would look less suspicious than the chests, and that the treasure would not only be more secure, but easier to handle.

"We'll make the time, old man," said Tom. "You take a chisel and I'll take the hatchet and we'll go up there right away and tackle the job. We'll bring down a couple of boxes first and Miss Foster and Professor Scotchley can pack them while we go back for two more."

Val agreed to that, and they started back through the passage.

Tom opened one box and Val another, and after taking the jugs of schnapps out they carried the boxes down to the marine cavern.

"Pack the bags of gold first," suggested Val, "and drop a few watches and rings into the spaces to fill up."

The boys then returned to the upper cavern for two more boxes.

By the time they had six boxes down and packed Val said it was time to eat, and so the party knocked off work for dinner.

It took a dozen of the small boxes to hold all of the treasure, and the covers were nailed back again as before.

The four sea-chests were hauled to another part of the cave and the boxes piled in their places ready for transportation.

"That's all we can do to-day, and it's a mighty satisfactory job," said Val, complacently. "Now we'll get back to our rendezvous."

They all returned to the upper cave, and each taking two jugs of the gin, left the place and walked back to the cave by the seashore.

Jack Junk and Mate Fox were back and had reported no ship in sight.

The mate had shot three rabbits and they were waiting to be skinned and cooked.

The sailor eyed the gin in a loving way, and Val told him he should have a jug of it after supper.

At ten that night he was blazing drunk, and whooping things up along the beach.

Next day the boys, accompanied by Ruby and Professor Scotchley, went to the cove to look for the Golden Gate.

She was not in the offing, nor was there any sign of a sail during the two hours they hung about the place.

Every day after that for two weeks somebody went to the cove, but the trip was a vain one, and then the impression began to prevail that the ship had been lost in the gale.

The prospect of getting off the island grew less and less as the days passed, and finally a month elapsed without the appearance of a sail.

A second and third month succeeded, and the boys began to wonder how long the party was fated to remain.

Jack Junk was the happiest of the party, apparently, for he had all the gin he wanted, and he seemed to have arrived at the conclusion that there was no treasure on the island after all, especially as Val and Tom ceased to speak about it.

One morning, after the party had been six months on the island, they awoke to find a bark anchored in the inlet.

The captain and crew of the vessel were surprised to find people on the island.

The bark had put in to get a supply of fresh water.

She was bound for San Francisco, and her captain consented to take the shipwrecked and the marooned people on board and carry them to the United States.

Arrangements were also made for transportation of the boxes containing the treasure, which were represented as containing Holland gin.

The kegs of what was found to be prime French brandy, nearly 100 years old, were presented to the captain of the bark in payment for their passage and freight on the cases, and as they were easily worth nearly \$1,000, the skipper made a good thing out of the arrangement.

In due time the bark reached San Francisco and the cases were landed in bond.

Subsequently the professor and Tom's father had their contents appraised.

The money was allowed to enter free of duty, but the watches, ornaments, silver vessels and jewelry were assessed according to the schedule for such things, and a duty was paid on them, after which they were sold to the best advantage.

Altogether, \$1,500,000 was realized out of the treasure, of which Val received \$600,000, and Professor Scotchley, Tom and Ruby \$300,000 apiece.

Captain Foster was now relieved from any further necessity of following the sea for a living, and he settled down in a new and pretty home for good.

Val and Tom went to the University of California together, and after their graduation went into the office of a prominent lawyer and studied for the bar.

Val was a frequent visitor at Captain Foster's home and soon after his graduation he asked the old skipper for the hand of his daughter Ruby.

A year later they were married, and Tom was best man on that occasion.

Tom got spliced himself a year afterward, and now both boys have splendid homes, close to each other, where Professor Scotchley is an ever welcome visitor, and where they often talk about the Treasure of the Seven Craters.

THE END.

Read "A WALL STREET MYSTERY; OR, THE BOY WHO BEAT THE SYNDICATE," which will be the next number (136) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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Fame and Fortune Weekly

NEW YORK, MAY 1, 1908.

Terms to Subscribers.

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GOOD STORIES.

Among the old fountains in the Temple Area at Jerusalem, one of the finest is known as Bab Silsilea. The inscription, which is well preserved, states that it was erected about 800 years ago, and for centuries, as at the present time, it has been fed with water brought in pipes from Solomon's Pools, nine miles away.

Anthropologists have remarked that taking aim is a human characteristic that even the anthropoid apes cannot be said to share. Apes and monkeys frequently throw nuts and sticks, sometimes with unpleasant consequences to others; but they show little or no ability to take accurate aim. The baboon is said to excel somewhat in this respect; but still it would never pass for a marksman. Accuracy of eye and the judgment of direction and distance that are involved in real aiming have been developed only by man, and are among the tokens of his intellectual superiority.

Silks and satins are none too good for the Indian women on some of the Western reservations. A writer in *Fur News*, who visited the trading post at Naudau, says that the women were hitting up the demand for silks and satins, canned goods, and other luxuries, at a furious rate. The storekeeper at the post announced that certain silken scarfs, perhaps eighteen inches square, of bright red, blue, and purple colors, were selling like hot cakes at from \$1.50 to \$2 apiece. The scarfs are worn by the squaws in the manner of a fascinator, and no care as to their cleanliness, etc., seemed to be taken by the owners. Visitors saw many squaws at the post dressed in the finest of silk, but it is put on in such a manner that the beauty of the goods is lost.

In locking his safe prior to his going home for supper George Edgemont, a paper-hanger who lives at Jefferson street and Hermitage lane, Manayunk, shut the safe door upon his flowing whiskers and was held until released by his daughter. Edgemont had been out collecting bills during the day. Returning to his office, he opened his safe and placed the money in it. He then threw the door shut, catching the end of his beard in the door. In the excitement incident to his odd predicament he forgot the combination and so could not release himself. With his chin resting on the safe he was discovered about an hour after the accident by his daughter, who came to find what had delayed him. The safe was broken open by a locksmith.

Not infrequently, complaint is made in the magazines and more conservative newspapers, that the art of letter-writing has been lost; that the grace and charm, as exemplified in the correspondence of writers in other days, finds no parallel in this matter-of-fact period. Answer is usually returned that

the man or woman of to-day is too busily engaged to permit of their indulgence in the epistolary affectations or olden times. Certainly the letter-writers of those days enjoyed the advantage of great leisure. It is difficult, otherwise, to account for their prodigality of phrasing. Lady Pomfret, we are told, presented to Lady Hereford a pair of alabaster vases, and received in return a letter of thanks fitted to the times. "There is," wrote the recipient of the vases, "an elegance in them superior to anything I ever saw; and yet, inestimable and beautiful as they are in themselves, their being a mark of your friendship enhances their value to me even beyond their merit. I sit and look at them with admiration for an hour together. I have not a room in the house worthy of them, no furniture good enough to fit with them; in short, I find a thousand wants that never entered my head before. I am grown ambitious all at once, and want to change my house for a palace, and to ransack all the cabinets in Europe for paintings, sculptures, and other curiosities, to place with them." Even Lady Pomfret, who was herself a pretty fair phrase-maker, seems to have been a little abashed by her friend's enthusiasm. "You quite confound me, dear madam," she replied, "with the encomiums you bestow upon a couple of alabaster vases fit only for the obscurity of a grotto, and very justly make me blush for having sent so trifling a present." This extravagant diction is equaled by that of the Princess Craon when writing to Sir Horace Walpole. After thanking Walpole for some trifle, the Princess says: "The generosity of your friendship for me, sir, leaves me nothing to desire of all that is precious in England, China, and the Indies."

JOKES AND JESTS.

The longest reign in history—the deluge.

The One—Is Griggsby a truthful man? The Other—Yes, except when his wife asks him for money.

Sabbath School Teacher—What does the parable of the Prodigal Son teach us? Bobby Trickneck—Not to be fatted calves, ma'am.

"Our time is money," grumbled the collector. "Then," replied the debtor, "how can you afford to waste so much of it in chasing me?"

"Binks has no bump of reverence at all." "He certainly hasn't. Why, if he wanted to offer prayer to Jupiter Pluvius, he'd call him 'Jupe!'"

The Brute—What were you thinking of, Dorothy? Dorothy—I was dreaming of my youth. The Brute—Ah! I thought you had a far-away look in your eyes.

Dyer—What did your wife say when you told her you wouldn't be home till late? Rownder—I don't know. I hung up the receiver as soon as I was through talking.

"That Boston girl seems very frank and outspoken." "Yes, but she can't call a spade a spade." "What does she call it?" "She calls it a metallic instrument used in bucolic pursuits."

"Aren't you afraid your persistent refusal of a nomination will hurt your prospects?" "Certainly not," answered the eminent politician. "If I hadn't enough friends to overcome a little obstacle like that I would not stand a show of being elected, anyhow."

"Can you give bond?" asked the judge. "Have you got anything?" "Jedge," replied the prisoner, "sence you ax me, I'll tell you. I hain't got nuthin' in the worl', 'cept the spring chills, six acres o' no 'count land, a big family, a hope of a hereafter, an' the ol' war rheumatism."

THE MYSTERIOUS VALISE

By Col. Ralph Fenton.

"Sentry, will you kindly keep your eye on my bag for a few minutes? I am going to have a plunge in the Serpentine," said a well-dressed, middle-aged gentleman to me, one warm summer morning, a few years ago, as I was on duty at the park gate of Knightsbridge Cavalry Barracks.

"All right, sir," I replied. "If I am relieved before you return, I shall hand it over to the next sentry."

"Oh, I sha'n't be more than half an hour, at the latest, as I must be in the city by nine. I prefer leaving my valise with you. There are so many vagabonds always swarming about Hyde Park that it is quite possible one of them might take a fancy to it while I am bathing. It doesn't contain very valuable property—only a suit of clothes and a few documents 'of no use to any one but the owner,' as the saying is. All the same, however, I have no desire to lose it." So saying, the gentleman turned away, and walked briskly across the park in the direction of the Serpentine.

The request to look after his property did not in the least surprise me, as numerous robberies from the clothing of persons bathing had for some time before been reported to the police. I lifted the bag, upon which the letters "W. N." were painted, and which was in the battered condition indicative of having been much tumbled about, and placed it behind the low wall that lay between the barracks and the foot path.

The barracks clock struck eight. Fully half an hour had elapsed since the owner of the bag departed, and as yet there was no sign of him. The "quarter past" was chimed from the neighboring clocks, and still he did not turn up; and as the minutes passed I thought to myself that it was time he was looking sharp if he really wished to be in the city by nine.

About half-past eight I perceived a great commotion in the park. Men were rushing from all quarters in the direction of the Serpentine, and soon afterward I ascertained from a passer-by that the excitement was caused by one of the numerous bathers having been drowned. An uneasy suspicion was at once excited within me that the person who had come to such a sad end was the gentleman who had left his valise in my charge, which suspicion was intensified when I was relieved at nine, with the article still unclaimed. I reflected, however, that its owner might have been chained to the scene of the disaster by that morbid curiosity which induces people to linger about the spot where any calamity of the kind has recently occurred, and then, finding that he was pressed for time, and knowing that his property would be perfectly safe, had gone direct to the city.

I handed over the bag to the sentry who relieved me, without mentioning to him anything of the circumstances of the case; and when he returned from duty at eleven I eagerly asked him if the valise had been called for.

"No," he replied. "It is still lying behind the wall."

I went on sentry again at one o'clock, and no one had come for it. It was the height of the London season, and Hyde Park presented its customary gay appearance; but the imposing array of splendidly appointed equipages, dashing equestrians, and fashionably dressed ladies and gentlemen, which at other times was to me a most interesting spectacle, that afternoon passed by unheeded, as all my thoughts were centered on speculations regarding the fate of the owner of the bag. Before being relieved at three, I had it conveyed to my room in the barracks, and, after coming off guard, placed it, for greater security, in the troop store. That evening, before "stables," when the orderly corporal had read out the duties for the succeeding day, he said, addressing me:

"Jones, you have to attend the orderly room to-morrow."

"Why?" I inquired.

"You have been reported for neglecting to salute Captain Sir Carnaby Jinks as he passed you while on sentry this afternoon," was the corporal's answer.

I said nothing by way of excuse. This heinous charge was, in all probability, true. I believe I might have omitted to "present" to her majesty, the queen herself, if she had passed that afternoon in her state carriage, so distracted was I by the engrossing subject of this valise.

After stables I left barracks for my customary walk, and purchasing a copy of the *Echo* from a juvenile news vender, I read the particulars of the fatality of the morning. Friends had identified the body, which was that of a gentleman named Nixon, who had resided at Bayswater.

"Nixon! That corresponds with the initial 'N.' on the bag," I thought to myself, now perfectly convinced that the deceased was the person I had seen in the morning. I also ascertained from the newspaper report that a man had been apprehended on suspicion of having attempted to rifle the pockets of the clothes of the drowned man, and who had been roughly handled by the crowd before a policeman could be procured to take him into custody. After a moment's reflection I decided to call at the address given in the paper, in order to arrange about the restoration of the bag to the relatives of the deceased.

Reaching the house, I knocked softly at the door, and stated my business to the domestic who appeared, by whom I was shown into a room, and immediately afterward was waited upon by a young lady, the daughter of the deceased, who, naturally enough, was perfectly overcome with grief. I explained to her in a few words the object of my visit.

"I am uncertain whether poor papa had a valise of that description when he left this morning," she said, "but possibly you may recognize him from this photograph," submitting one she took from the table for my inspection.

I experienced a strange sense of relief. The features in the photograph were those of a person bearing no resemblance whatever to the individual who had left his bag in my charge.

The young lady thanked me heartily for the trouble I had taken in the matter, and I left the house of mourning and returned to the barracks in a very mystified state of mind.

"Could the owner of the bag be the thief who had been caught in the act of plundering the dead man's clothes?" I asked myself, but immediately dismissed the idea from my mind as being absurd and improbable.

Next day I attended the orderly room and received a severe admonition from the commanding officer. Fortunately for me, as it happened, Sir Carnaby had been in plain clothes, so my offense, in the eye of martial law, was of a comparatively venial character. Immediately afterward I considered it my duty to report the circumstances attending the valise to the adjutant, who in turn communicated with the police authorities at Scotland Yard, and that evening, pursuant to instructions received, I had the bag conveyed to that establishment. After I had explained how it was placed in my charge it was opened in my presence by an official, and was found to contain just a suit of old clothes and a few newspapers, but no documents of any kind, as stated by its owner.

Some time afterward I was on Queen's Guard, Westminster. I had just mounted my horse, and taken up position in one of the two boxes facing Parliament Street, when a gentleman stopped opposite me and scanned me curiously. Addressing me, he said: "Don't you remember me?"

There was no mistaking the voice. It was that of the owner of the bag. Otherwise he was greatly altered, as he had denuded himself of the luxuriant whiskers and mustache which he wore when I saw him previously.

"What has been wrong?" I asked.

"Oh, I was seized with a fit that morning when I came out of the water, and was taken home in an unconscious state. I have been very unwell ever since, and have left my house for the first time to-day. I made inquiries at barracks about you, and as the soldier I spoke to seemed to know about the bag I left with you, he directed me here."

"Well, sir," I said, "I had quite made up my mind that you were the gentleman who was drowned that morning, and when I discovered my mistake I am almost ashamed to own that I took you for the man who was apprehended on the charge of trying to plunder the drowned man's clothes."

The gentleman smiled pleasantly, and said: "Ah! I read about that. And now to business. I wish to get my bag at once. I presume you have it in safe keeping at the barracks?"

"It's much nearer at hand," I replied. "Just across the street from here." And then I told him that it was in the custody of the police authorities at Scotland Yard.

"It is very awkward, indeed," he said. "I have to catch the six train for Liverpool, as I wish to sail by the steamer that leaves to-morrow morning for New York. Couldn't you come across with me to get it?"

"You forget that I am on sentry," I replied. "I won't be relieved until four, and even then, I dare not leave the guard; nor would I care to ask permission to do so. You should go at once to the captain of the guard and represent the case to him, and perhaps, under the circumstances, he will permit me to accompany you."

Acting on my advice, he proceeded at once to the officer in command, leaving me extremely amused at the fuss he was making about his bag, considering all that it was worth.

Soon afterward he returned, with a smiling face, and informed me that the captain had acceded to his request. I expressed my gratification at this intelligence, and added: "Surely, sir, you have been shaving since I last saw you?"

"Yes. I was threatened with the recurrence of a nasty skin complaint to which I was formerly subject."

During the interval that elapsed until my period of duty was ended, the gentleman paced about in a most impatient manner, ever and anon seeming to relieve his feelings by stopping to pat my horse. At length I left my post, and, dismounting, led my charger to the stable and handed it over to a comrade. Then, divesting myself of my cuirass, was ready to proceed to Scotland Yard.

One of the corporals on guard received orders to accompany me; so, together with the gentleman, we started, and, crossing the street, reached the police headquarters in a minute or two, and on making inquiries were directed to the "Lost Property" department. We stated our business, and an official, after receiving an assurance from me that the applicant was the right person, speedily produced the valise.

"Why didn't you see about this before?" he asked, addressing the gentleman.

"Because I was too ill to see about anything," was the reply.

The gentleman then signed a book, certifying that his property had been restored to him, giving, as he did so, the name of Nobbs.

Having thanked the official, Mr. Nobbs caught up his property, and we left the office. When we got to the door we found assembled a small crowd of men employed about the establishment, for the unusual spectacle of two helmeted, jack-booted guardsmen had caused a good deal of speculation as to our business there. Mr. Nobbs hurriedly brushed past them, and, gaining the street, hailed a passing cab, and the driver at once pulled up.

"Here is something for your trouble," he said, slipping a sovereign into my hand.

I, of course, thanked him heartily for his munificent douceur.

Declining the offer of the driver to place his bag on the dicky, he put it inside the vehicle; then shaking hands with the corporal and myself, he said to the driver: "Euston, as fast as you can!" and then entered the cab.

The driver released the brake from the wheel, and was whipping up his scraggy horse with a view to starting, when the poor animal slipped and fell.

The men belonging to Scotland Yard, who had followed us into the street, at once rushed to the driver's assistance, unbuckled the traces, and after pushing back the cab got the horse on its feet. All the while Mr. Nobbs was watching the operations from the window, and I noticed that one of the men was surveying him very attentively.

"Your name is Judd, isn't it?" the man at length remarked.

"No, it isn't! What do you mean by addressing me, sir?" indignantly replied Mr. Nobbs.

"Well," said the man—whom I at once surmised was a member of the detective force—"that's the name you gave, anyhow, when you were up on the charge of feeling the pockets of the gent's clothes who was drowned in the Serpentine a week ago. I know you, although you have had a clean shave."

I started on hearing this statement. My suspicions, ridiculous as they seemed at the time, had turned out to be correct, after all, while Mr. Judd, alias Nobbs, turned as pale as death.

"Come out of that cab," said the detective.

"You've no right to detain me," said Nobbs. "I was discharged this morning."

"Because nothing was known against you. But, look here, old man, what have you got in that bag?"

"Only some old clothes, I assure you," said the crestfallen Nobbs.

"Come inside, and we'll see," said the detective, seizing the bag. "Out of the cab—quick! Come with me to the office."

Mr. Nobbs complied with a very bad grace, while the corporal and I followed, wondering what was going to happen next.

We entered a room in the interior, and the bag was opened, but it apparently contained nothing but the clothes.

"There is certainly no ground for detaining the man," said an inspector standing near.

Mr. Nobbs at once brightened up and cried:

"You see I have told you the truth, and now be good enough to let me go."

"All right," said the detective. "Pack up your traps and clear out!"

Mr. Nobbs this time complied with exceeding alacrity, and began to replace the articles of clothing, when the detective, seemingly acting on a sudden impulse, caught up the valise and gave it a vigorous shake. A slight rustling sound was distinctly audible.

"Hello! What's this?" cried the officer.

Emptying the clothes out of the bag, he produced a pocket-knife, and in a trice ripped open a false bottom, and found—about two dozen valuable diamond rings and a magnificent emerald necklet carefully packed in wadding, besides a number of unset stones.

The jubilant detective at once compared them with a list which he took from a file, and pronounced them to be the entire proceeds of a daring robbery that had recently been committed in the shop of a West End jeweler, and which amounted in value to fifteen hundred pounds.

Mr. Nobbs, alias Judd, now looking terribly confused and abashed at this premature frustration of his plan to clear out of the country with his booty, was formally charged with being in possession of the stolen valuables. He made no reply, and was led away in custody.

Before returning to the guard I remarked to the inspector:

"I thought, sir, when he gave me a sovereign for looking after his bag, that it was more than it was worth, but now I find that I have been mistaken."

"A sovereign!" cried the inspector. "Let me see it!"

I took the coin from my cartouche box, where I had placed it, in the absence of an accessible pocket, and handed it to him.

He smilingly examined it and threw it on the table.

"I thought as much," he remarked. "It's a bad one."

Mr. Nobbs, alias Judd—these names were two of a formidable string of aliases—turned out to be an expert coiner, burglar, and swindler, who had long been "wanted" by the police. He was convicted, and sentenced to a lengthy period of penal servitude.

A few weeks after Mr. Nobbs had received his well-earned punishment I received a visit from a gentleman who stated that he was cashier in the jeweler's establishment in which the robbery had been committed. He informed me that his employer, having taken into consideration the fact that I was, to a certain extent, instrumental in the recovery of the stolen jewelry, had sent me a present of thirty pounds.

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